

The BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Devoted To Far West Life



BUFFALO BILL'S FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT

OR PAWNEE BILL AND THE
KING OF LAND BOOMERS

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"



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Buffalo Bill's lariat dragged the boomer king from his deep saddle as he was about to ride down the defiant chief.

THE BUFFALO BILL

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION

STORIES

DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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OR,

PAWNEE BILL AND THE KING OF THE LAND BOOMERS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WITH THE THEODOLITE.

The man with the theodolite looked at the low hill some distance off and made mental estimates of the amount of cutting which a railway would have to do there, if it went that way.

Generally speaking, the country was so level that not much grading would be required, and there were so few streams that but few culverts and bridges would be needed. Altogether, it was a fine place through which to build a railroad, and he meant to recommend it in strong terms to the men who had sent him out to look it over.

As he looked at the hill something seemed to move on top of it.

"A wolf, or a mountain lion, perhaps," he thought, and trained his little telescope on the hilltop.

What he beheld astonished him. A man was crouching there behind the concealment of a scraggy bush, and it seemed that the man had seen him and was watching him.

The discovery threw him into something like panic.

Being on the Sweetwater Indian Reservation, he was on forbidden ground, and he knew it. Forbidden at all times, the situation was much worse now, if caught, since the recent Indian troubles there. The Indian agent claimed that the presence of the white men in and round the reservation had fomented the trouble, and threatened

that any one found there now would be punished to the full extent of the law.

Hence the alarm of the surveyor, and the haste with which he pulled together the legs of his tripod, and threw the surveying instrument on his shoulder.

Some distance out from the base of the hill was a clump of small timber in which he had left his horse. He was wishing he had wings with which to cover quickly that distance; yet as he moved off he did not even dare break into a run; for there was a chance that the man on the hill had not seen him, or did not suspect his purpose there, or was not one of the Indian police.

But he could not keep from walking rapidly, and now and then he turned his head with a quick glance thrown at the hill, to see if the man had left his place or was descending.

By reason of enforced detours it took the surveyor half an hour to reach the grove. Though he had come up hastily, he halted on its edge to listen. Not hearing anything, he entered, and soon saw his horse in the position it had been left in.

"If the fellow did come down from the hill, I'm ahead of him," he said, with a breath of relief; "and once I am in that saddle I don't think he can catch me, unless he does it with a bullet."

But as he stepped up to untie the horse, he was stopped by seeing that it was already untied.

Then he heard a chuckle, and, looking up with a start, he beheld a little old man sitting in squat attitude on a bough of the tree.

The man on the bough had very bright eyes, a furrowed, bearded face, and was dressed like an old-time borderman, even to the cap that rested on top of his head.

"Te-hee," came the chuckle again.

Then the little old man came down like a flying squirrel. Spreading his legs, he struck firmly in the saddle, and with a swoop of his hand caught at the bridle reins lying on the horse's neck.

"I reckon," he spat at the surveyor, "thet Buffler Bill is waitin' fer you."

Fear of the consequences if he fell into the hands of Buffalo Bill made the surveyor see red. With a sweep the theodolite rose from his shoulders, and the next instant the "te-hee-ing" old man was knocked by it out of the saddle.

He caught at it, and at the saddle horn, as he went over; but he could not save himself from his fall, though he brought the theodolite clattering down on top of him.

The breath was so completely knocked out of him that for a minute he was dazed and helpless, and before he could recover, the stranger had leaped to the saddle, and was riding out of the grove.

Pushing aside the theodolite which weighted him down, the old man lifted himself to a sitting position, as a roar broke from his lips. The man on horseback had set his beast at a gallop.

"Er-waugh! Waugh!"

A revolver shone in the old man's hand, was half lifted; then was lowered.

"No, n-no," he sputtered. "Ef yer has a crazy notion ter shoot anything, go shoot yer fool self. Waugh!"

He arose with difficulty, gave the theodolite a kick, and began to hobble lamely toward the edge of the timber.

But when he got there he stopped. The horseman was half a mile away, and going like the wind.

The old man shook his fist at the vanishing figure.

"Go et—go et; but lemme tell you that ye'll never meet up ag'in with a fool like ther one ye've left hyar; so ye reely ought to come back an' take a good look at him as a speciment. Waugh! Er-waugh!"

He shook his fist again at the horseman; and then, as if to even matters, lifted one heavy foot and tried to kick himself.

"Yas, an' thet is plum so; old Nick Nomad is ther boss fool o' ther universe this trip, an' he ain't goin' ter allow thet ter be discounted. Ef he hadn't tried ter be smart, and cute, and all ther other things which prove how childish he's gittin' ter be, he'd have held ye up at the p'int of his pistol, an' he'd 'a' had ye; but he must go ter playin' leapfrog an' circus, jest ter prove thet he is younger an' spryer than he is, and you properly lams him over the head and skedaddles."

He gave another "woof" or two, like a disgruntled bear; then he shuffled back to the spot where disaster had overtaken him.

"A quar insterment," he muttered, scratching his head, and looking down at it. "Et's ther fust time I ever war kicked over by a thing what has three laigs."

Feeling exceedingly foolish over his misadventure, old

Nomad lifted the theodolite, and setting it across his shoulders, he took his way thoughtfully out of the grove, and in the direction of the hill.

Near its base he encountered Pawnee Bill, who had been the man on the hilltop.

"Waal, he got erway," said Nomad ruefully, "an' come nigh killin' me while doin' et; but I ain't desarvin' of sympathy. I tried ter play monkey wi' him, and I jest got what war nacherly comin' my way. But look et this; et's ther thing he done ther brainin' act with."

"A surveying instrument," said Pawnee Bill.

"Et is? I didn't know but et war a new kind o' war club."

"You're hurt?"

"Not ernough ter kill me. Whar them brass p'int's rammed inter my head an' shoulders thar aire some spots thet's doin' the achin' act tremenjus, but as I deserved 'em I ain't goin' ter notice 'em."

"As you were in the grove, or near it, I rather hoped you would corral him, and I was coming down as fast as I could to help you. But this will serve as proof."

"We mout," said Nomad soberly, "ketch him yit by hard ridin'."

But he did not say it hopefully.

"We'll not try it."

"What ye goin' ter do?"

"I think," said Pawnee Bill, "that we ought to report this at once to Major Glover, and to Cody."

"Kerrect!"

"So we'll move for the agency as soon as we can get our horses."

Nomad was in the grove, but at the farther side of it. Pawnee Bill's was near the base of the hill.

"Pard Lillie, jest what does yer make out o' et?" Nomad asked, when their horses were under them, and they had headed toward the agency.

"I don't know exactly; but my guess would be that the land boomers have hired a surveyor to slip in here and run a few lines for them. Since this Indian trouble started up here they are expecting that such pressure will be brought to bear on Congress that the reservation will be taken away from the Indians and thrown open to settlement. It hasn't been surveyed; but they have slipped in and prospected over it more or less, and no doubt a good many of them have picked out the land they would like to have. That's only a guess."

"We war sent out hyar," reflected Nomad, "to keep land boomers an' other sech like noxious insects from crossin' the line and rammin' round, makin' the Injuns more nervous than what they aire already; which they're now that fidgety thet ef a grasshopper should jump under their caballos they'd stand ready ter bolt. Cody is tryin' ter coax 'em to come back quiet an' settle down in their villages, an' is makin' 'em all sorts o' promises, ef they will. But yer cain't hold 'em quiet, ef white men frum outside keep prowlin' over their lands all ther time."

He had swung the theodolite across his horse before him, and objurgated both the instrument and its owner whenever it slipped and hammered his knees.

At the end of an hour of sharp riding the agency buildings of the Sweetwater Reservation rose before them.

CHAPTER II.

A THREAT OF TROUBLE.

Major Glover, the Indian agent, was going through the bundle of mail which had been brought in from the distant railroad by one of his Indian couriers.

There were letters from old army friends, which he read first, for with the major pleasure often came before business. And there were dispatches from the Indian department, which he went through next. They concerned the reported outbreak among the Sweetwater Sioux. These the major swore at roundly, and threw angrily on the floor.

"There has been no Indian outbreak here," he roared, "and I have so reported. A wild raid of a few young bucks, who did nothing more than drive off a few cattle, is not an Indian outbreak; and the fact that the Indians were thrown into a stampede by land boomers, and fled into the Bad Lands, is not an Indian outbreak. Nobody has been killed."

The major was coming to the task of opening the miscellaneous letters, when he heard a trampling of hoofs, and one of his faithful Indian police tapped on the door of his office.

"Come in," cried the major surlily.

The door flew open, and a young Indian wearing the reservation uniform stood in the door, giving the military salute.

"Who is out there?" said the major. "Some more bothersome reporters, looking round for more lies to spread before the people of the United States? If so, send 'em packing."

"Pa-e-has-ka's friends," said the Indian.

"Oh! Well, show 'em in."

He sat drumming the arm of his easy-chair, and heard the men dismounting out by the hitching post. Then he heard them mount the steps of the agency building, and come in by way of the hall.

As he got up to welcome them, and threw open the door, he saw that they were Pawnee Bill and the old borderman, Nick Nomad. Nomad was carrying the theodolite that had come so near cracking his ancient skull.

"Glad to see you," cried the major. "Come right in."

The letters and telegrams which he had flung to the floor lay there still; but the others were on his desk.

"Be careful that some of those things don't bite you," he warned. "They're crazy enough."

Then he pointed to chairs, and looked curiously at the theodolite, which Nomad was unloading from his shoulders.

"I thought it war some kind er war club," said Nomad, as soberly as if he really believed it, "but Pawnee Bill, hyar, he says it's a plum peaceable surveyor's instrument; but I can tell ye thet ther said surveyor warn't in no peaceable frame o' mind when he hit me with et."

Pawnee Bill told the story of their discovery of the surveyor, and of his escape, with running comments from the borderman.

Major Glover frowned.

"Probably your guess is true," he said, "and it was the work of the land boomers; land thieves, I call 'em. It's a great pity that you didn't capture him; I'd have done my part to railroad him into the penitentiary."

After they had talked a while he turned to his unopened mail.

"If you will remain here, and excuse me just a minute, I'll see what is in the rest of these letters."

He opened and read them one by one, slowly.

Suddenly a roar escaped him.

"A railroad!" he cried. "What next?"

Pawnee Bill fished some cigars out of the top of his Stetson; and threw them on the table. One he selected for himself.

"A quiet smoke next," he said, "I think would be a fine thing; you are getting apoplectic."

Major Glover, glaring at the letter, had seemed about to break into another roar; but this smiling remark from Pawnee Bill let down the tension.

He turned with a laugh, and picked up one of the cigars.

"You always carry good smokes with you, Pawnee Bill," he said, "and I suppose I do need a nerve-sweetener right about now. I've had so much worry over this Indian trouble recently that I'm as easily flustered as a setting hen. How you and Cody go through with what you do and yet manage to keep cool goes ahead of me."

He struck a match, and somehow the world seemed a bit rosier as he viewed it through the smoke of that good cigar.

Old Nomad, camped on a chair near by, though Pawnee Bill pushed the cigars toward him, declined the invitation, and lugged out his old black brier.

"Thar never war a cigyar c'd beat my ole pipe," he said, chipping with his knife at a bit of hard plug he dug out of a pocket. "An Injun war the 'rig'nal smoker o' this kentry, and he still hangs ter a pipe."

"And to all the other out-of-date things," said Pawnee Bill, with a smile. "You're welcome to your pipe."

"Now, this letter," said Glover, tapping it with his forefinger, "is from a friend in Washington. And it shows that I'm right up against the cloven hoof. We thought the boomers, desiring this Indian land, were making all the trouble. But back of the boomers, and pulling the strings at Washington, is a railroad syndicate, that wants to run a railway line right through the reservation, and build a town. A bill is all ready to be presented in Congress, opening this land to settlers, and giving this railroad company the choicest of it in a belt straight through the middle. Now you see the cat in the meal bag, and you understand why I haven't been backed as heartily as I expected. Some of the government men are as straight as a string, but some of the others are—rotten."

He looked at the theodolite.

"That explains what you saw to-day; that was a railroad surveyor out there, you can bet your boots."

"Call me a greaser, if I don't think you are right, major. It's too bad we weren't able to land him, and bring him in here. I reckon we could make him talk up proper."

"Hit me again, Pard Lillie," said Nomad mournfully, for the way in which the surveyor had got away from him made him sore.

Pawnee Bill laughed and puffed a ring of smoke at the ceiling.

"You weren't to blame, old Diamond," he declared.

"I'm opinin' thet I war. Trouble is," he said, "I'm a-gittin' too old fer this hyar harum-skarum life o' follelin' you and Euffer round; you young bucks hit up a gait thet's too much fer the ole man. Also, I allow thet

I'm gittin' p'intedly childish; otherwise, I'd a-pulled er gun on thet scalawag, instid o' trying any funny biz; an' then I'd corralled him easy."

"Your conscience is troubling you," laughed Pawnee Bill.

Major Glover was still glaring at the letter which had informed him that a railroad syndicate was backing the land boomers, and that certain congressmen were backing, or aiding, the syndicate.

"Whenever politics goes to mixing in an affair like this," he grumbled, "I feel like pulling my tepee poles and getting from under."

"Which wouldn't be at all like my old fighting friend, Major Glover."

The old veteran's eyes flashed.

"That's right, Lillie; and I'll stay right behind the guns—you can wager your last dollar on that."

He picked up another letter and tore it open.

As his eyes glanced down the page another roar escaped him.

"Deserted Jericho! Don't scare me so," laughed Pawnee Bill.

"Listen to this," snorted the Indian agent.

Then he read:

"Bill Fisher, the king-pin of the land boomers, whom you had jailed at Ringgold, on the charge of breaking the agency regulations and lifting cattle, broke jail two days ago, and is now at large. He will no doubt make straight tracks for the boomer camp near the agency, so look out for him. He is in a mood to make a whole lot of trouble."

Pawnee Bill's eyes snapped with sudden excitement, and old Nomad came half out of his chair and dropped his smoking pipe to the floor.

"What's the name of the jasper that wrote that?" Pawnee Bill asked.

"My old friend, Sergeant Atkins; and he never reports a thing unless he knows it's so."

"Then that's trouble brewin'," said Nomad, stopping to pick up his pipe. "Er-waugh! Buffler ort ter know erbout thet instanter."

"You're right, old Diamond," Pawnee Bill agreed; "but to find Cody right off would be difficult. He is somewhere in the Bad Lands, with the baron and Little Cayuse, pow-wowing with that old medicine man and the Sioux, trying to get them to live up to their word and come back to the reservation. And it was this land boomer, Bill Fisher, who threw that stampede into them and made all the row."*

"If he comes round here again," roared the angry agent, "he'll go back to that jail as quick as my Indian police can get him there. And then he'll do time in the pen. I think I've got him dead to rights on a conspiracy charge now, and I'll press it."

He went through other letters, but they were of a quieter kind, and his ruffled feathers coming down after a while, he proceeded to enjoy the excellent cigar he had been making a pretense of smoking.

"And that's all," he said, as he tossed the final letter aside.

*See last week's issue, "Buffalo Bill's Battle Cry; or Pawnee Bill and the Indian Stampede." You will find in it some interesting details that fit into this narrative.

"Er-waugh!" Nomad gulped. "Bein' that I ain't no hawg fer trouble, I should say thet et's ernough."

CHAPTER III.

FLOATING STAR MIXES MEDICINE.

Floating Star, the medicine man of this particular division of the great Sioux nation, had quite as much faith in himself as his followers had in him.

On the night of his birth a meteor trailed its white light across the blackness of the sky, and gave him his name. Though he had never heard of the star that blazed when great Cæsar was born, it was of similar portent, for it announced him as kingly, with unusual and godlike powers. So he had never changed his name, as Indians often do. And it had made him the wise man and sorcerer that he now was. Having indicated that he was born to heavenly and supernatural powers, he had proceeded to develop them. The old medicine men had taken him in hand, given him of their mysterious lore, taught him their wonderful tricks and secrets, and brought him up to the work of an Indian healer and magician, for among Indians the healer is always a dealer in sorcery.

That much of the things imparted by the old wizards consisted of trickery of the most brazen sort did not disturb him, for there had grown up within him something he could not understand, but which in his belief stamped him as a man gifted in things of the spirit. He could look at a man so that the man would stiffen and become as dead, and often he could command men in that state and they would obey him. He had the gift of hypnotic power, though he had never heard the name; and it was that which made him believe in himself.

As this hypnotic gift was supposed to have been given to him by the spirits, he prayed to them constantly, and consulted them on every occasion of importance.

So now, when Buffalo Bill had asked him and his people to return to the reservation from which they had fled in fright, old Floating Star would do nothing until he had consulted the spirits.

Sometimes that took hours, but as often it took days, for not on every occasion could he hear the voices of the spirits.

Buffalo Bill had hoped that the half promise which the Sioux had given would be obeyed without delay, but it was not to be so.

He had received that half promise, and had gone away with Little Cayuse.

When the Indians still tarried in the Bad Lands, he had returned with Little Cayuse, leaving the baron, who had borne him company from the agency, outside, to watch round for whatever he might see.

The Indians would be willing to receive Pa-e-has-ka, the Indians' friend; and also Little Cayuse, who was himself an Indian, and had been with them recently. But they probably would have objected to the coming of the baron.

Baron von Schnitzenhauser promptly tucked his mule into a bush-hidden gully, and, crawling to the top of a hill some distance off, proceeded to get busy, watching the horizon and smoking his pipe.

"Ach," he was grumbling, however, "dhis iss too easy pitzness."

The baron was big of girth, and so it must be confessed that he was an anomaly, in that he did not like stifling quiet. Things could not go too fast to suit him; the greater the excitement the happier he was. Sometimes he called himself the Flying Dutchman.

Buffalo Bill and Little Cayuse, having penetrated toward the temporary village of the Sioux in the Bad Lands, came upon old Floating Star.

The medicine man was in a sand-drifted ravine, all alone, and nearly naked, except for a liberal coating of paint, which had been applied with great care, for even in that he had to be sure that he would please the spirits.

He had a queer idea of the things spirits would like, no doubt; anyway, the fantastic rings, triangles, serpents, and other oddities decorating his leather skin could not have been improved on from the standpoint of the bizarre.

In addition, an oxskin covered his shoulders and back, and the horns of the ox stuck up over the medicine man's ears as if they had grown there.

Buffalo Bill guessed, when he saw that oxhide, that one of the oxen recently rustled by the Sioux had contributed it.

Before Floating Star were some little sticks stuck upright in the sand. Half of them were painted red, the others were white. The red represented the Indians; the white ones stood for the white men. Old Floating Star was mixing medicine, in an effort to see into the future.

Now and then a wind sucked through the ravine as through a tunnel, and when it did so Floating Star jumped about and swung the oxhide, in an attempt to make the wind blow hardest against the white poles, to cause them to fall down. If the white poles fell down, then the white men could not prevail against the red men, and it would be safe for the Indians to return to the reservation. But if the red sticks by any chance toppled over, the Indians would have cause to fear the white men. Floating Star was naturally very anxious that the wind should not blow down any of the red sticks.

The ravine was picturesque as to its walls, a characteristic of the natural architecture of the Bad Lands. The sand and wind of ages had chiseled the rocks, until they had taken on all sorts of strange shapes. By the aid of the imagination one might find many animal forms, and even those of men, together with animal faces and the faces of men.

The simple credulity of the old medicine man made him look on these things as manifestations of the spirits; the spirits had carved those queer forms, and he believed that behind the caricatures of human faces spirits lurked, and looked down on him.

For that reason now and then he glanced up at them, and whispered a prayer, while keeping watch for the vagrant wind, that came sometimes when it was least expected, and so might, before he could prevent, tumble down the red sticks.

The wind not coming for a number of minutes, Floating Star began to crow hop round the sticks, thrusting his hands jerkily in the direction of those that were white, to push them over; and drawing, with equally jerky motions, the red sticks, in a pantomime.

Some distance away, unobserved, the scout and Little Cayuse stood watching this singular performance.

Little Cayuse was deeply impressed, though he did not understand just what the medicine man was doing; yet he knew he was praying to the spirits.

"What um mean, Pa-e-has-ka?" he asked.

Buffalo Bill's hand fell on his shoulder.

"Quiet," he warned.

While he was crow hopping round the sticks, waving the oxhide, a wind tore through the ravine, and it came so quickly that Floating Star could not get over and protect the red sticks from its strength. As a consequence red sticks and white sticks all went down in a heap together.

Floating Star stopped, and stared.

Then he saw that the sticks, which had been leaning toward each other, had fallen together.

That might mean either of two things: that the white men and red men had fallen together, and were fighting, or had fallen together in friendship.

But that the red sticks had fallen was of itself very bad as an omen.

His wail of anxiety rose dolefully.

The wind, flirting upward as it swished through the ravine, dislodged a stone, and it came hurtling down, barely missing the medicine man's head.

He started up, bewildered, with the idea at first that one of the human-shaped rock forms had taken life and had done the thing.

Then his mouth fell open.

Even a worse thing had happened. One of the rock forms had become alive, and changed to a white man's face. It was in a cleft, and it looked down at Floating Star; the mouth was open in a grin, and one eye winked at him in a familiar way.

Floating Star's wail changed to a howl, and with the tail of the oxhide flapping in the wind he fled like a streak through the ravine, and vanished in the direction of the Indian village.

The man winked again, then he laughed, showing a big mouth.

"Te-hee! Ho, ho, ho!" he gurgled. "That was about the funniest performance that I ever seen."

The man's hilarious musing came to a sudden end.

Buffalo Bill, advancing into the ravine, saw him perched high on the side of the ravine like a frog. The next instant he was covered by the scout's revolver.

But even this did not daunt the fellow, though it stopped his laughter.

"Don't shoot," he said. "I'm Davy Crockett's coon, and I'll come down."

He lifted himself to his full height, and the scout beheld a greasy specimen of humanity, with a round, coarse face and twinkling eyes, that had much shrewdness and good humor in them.

"I suppose you're Buffalo Bill?" he said.

"Come down," the scout commanded.

"Easy—easy; I'm coming. I hope to goodness that ain't a hair-trigger pistol you're handlin' so reckless."

Then he came rolling and sliding down into the ravine, making an inglorious and disheveled descent.

As soon as his feet were on the ground he whirled toward the scout and shot his hands over his head.

"If this is a holdup," he said, "you're welcome to all I've got."

"What were you doing up there?"

The tatterdemalion glanced from the scout to the Piute, and back again.

"Watchin' that Indian," he confessed. "I mean the one what run away. This ain't reservation territory, I reckon."

"It isn't; but we're having trouble with the reservation Indians, and they're out here, so this is not a place for any white man who hasn't particular business with them."

"Well, I ain't responsible for that; I didn't run 'em off, er shoo 'em off. I've been prowlin' round out here prospectin'; it's a honorable trade, though gin'rally not highly profitable. A while ago I seen that red. Well, it was the funniest perform——"

"You frightened him. And that may mean something serious."

"Well, he did look skeered. But I don't see how it can mean anything serious." Again he looked from the scout to the Piute and back again. "I've heard of you, and knowin' you was in this vicinity I recognized ye. Say, if you're goin' on to that village, I'd like to go, too."

"I believe I haven't heard your name," the scout reminded.

"Basil Trent."

"I think I've heard of you."

"I don't doubt; wharever fame floats her irridescent wings men has heard of me—Bumptious Basil, always bitin' off more than he can chew, and buttin' in where angels fears to tread. That's me."

"I'm sorry, Trent," said the scout, speaking kindly, "that you frightened old Floating Star; for——"

"So that's his name; Floating Bull-tail would be better, jedgin' by the looks of him as he flew out of this. But I'm sorry, too, if I've disarranged anything."

"You're a patriotic citizen, I don't doubt?"

"Try me, an' see."

"If you are, you will get out of these hills until this Indian trouble blows over. I've been promising old Floating Star that no white men would be permitted to come in here, and have been trying to get him and his reds to return peaceably to the reservation. You can see how his discovery of you up there will go against that. He will jump to the idea, perhaps, that the Bad Lands are filled with white men."

"But if I go on with ye to the village?"

"You can't go!"

"That's flat?"

"It is, and I mean it. Take my advice, and get out of the hills right away. You'll find it good advice, for this is a dangerous place for any white man."

"You're here."

"That is different; and if I felt myself to be in danger, duty would send me here. But it's different with you."

"All right, Cody, I'll vamoose," the fellow promised. "When you hit my bump of patriotism you hit me right whar I live."

"I shall rely on your promise."

The scout turned and, with Little Cayuse, went on toward the village.

Though the weather had been cold for a number of days, the air was much warmer, and the snow had gone. In the full blaze of the sunshine the baron found the temperature very comfortable, indeed, so that sometimes he had hard work to keep from falling sound asleep.

"Idt iss too kviet vor me," he grumbled. "Here ve gome der Inchun reservation py, unt I am exbecting some fightdting righdt away kvick, unt idt aind't yidt. Aber I——"

He sat up with a low snort, and looked about.

"Vot iss?" he questioned. "Dit I heardt somedings, or vos I yoost treaming der schleeds oof habbiness?"

Then he heard it again—a distant trampling as of horses or cattle.

"Inchuns, meppeso," he whispered.

He crawled to his hands and knees, and tried to look off in the direction of the sound. It was growing nearer, but still he could see nothing.

Yet as he looked, a dozen steers came into view in one of the Bad Land ravines, and behind them came Indian horsemen.

The steers had a lagging gait, showing they had been driven hard and far.

"Himmelblitzen! Dot iss too padt," said the German. "Some more Inchuns raidting unt sdealing caddles. Unt all der vhiles dose same Inchuns iss delling Cody dhey ar-re petter as goot."

The German sank back, for he did not want to be seen, and watched the cattle and the mounted figures coming on.

Near the end of the ravine was a small water hole, and on reaching it the cattle and horses were permitted to drink.

The horsemen also camped down for a while, and, producing food, began to eat. The hungry cattle grazed on the scant herbage growing in niches of the rock.

The place sought by the raiders was so secluded that if the German had not been on the hilltop his chances of knowing they were there would have been small.

Fearing now for the safety of his mule, that he had tucked into a crevice not far from the raiders' camp, the German slipped down from the hill, and moved carefully toward it.

Perhaps it was an unfortunate movement; yet in the end the baron's proverbial luck came promptly uppermost.

Toofer, seeing his master, and being excited by the near presence of animals, lifted his voice in a welcoming bray, that went echoing among the rocks.

The baron stood rooted, and glared at the beast.

"You shackass fool," he whispered, "vhy you do dot? Now we ar-re bot' oof uss in dangerousness."

As it was unwise now to try to get out of that notch with Toofer, the baron contented himself with untying the beast and looping up the bridle rein. Then he crouched behind a bowlder, close by Toofer's side.

"Ve ar-re seening soon somet'ings, eh?" he said to Toofer. "Budt idt iss make a liddle excidementd, ennyhow. You yoost keeb a look mit bot' ears."

He heard a man stealing softly toward him, and Toofer heard the same, as was evidenced by the manner in which his big ears swung forward.

"You tond't like Inchuns, unt I knowed idt. All righdt, I aind't blaming you. But you must rememper dot Cody iss now making der peace schmoke mit 'em, unt ve tond't

CHAPTER IV.

THE BARON AND THE BOOMER KING.

On his high perch, a mile or two from the scene of the foregoing, the baron watched, and smoked, and cat-napped, whiling the hours away.

vandt to disturb der kviet unt harmony. So-o, oof an Inchun kills you, you shouldt yoost ledt him. Oof he kills me, vhy, dot iss different; I vos nodt a mool."

The head feathers of an Indian were thrust round an angle of a near-by rock, causing the mule's big ears to flop farther over in that direction. And there was a wrinkling of Toofer's nose that seemed to indicate hostility.

The Indian figure behind the feathers came on in sight, and, squatting in the sunshine which fell there, he looked about.

He was apparently looking for the owner of the mule. Seeing no one, he rose quickly, and advanced to Toofer, extending his hand to catch hold of the bridle rein.

A low whistle sounded at that moment, like the shrill hiss of a steam pipe, from the spot where the baron lay.

It was a signal familiar to Toofer, and for which he seemed to have been waiting; for as soon as he heard it he changed ends with lightning speed. Then his heels flew out, and landing in the stomach of the would-be thief, caused him to turn a somersault and land in a sitting heap three yards away.

Toofer whirled again, kicking in the air. The bewildered Indian clasped his stomach and groaned.

Then the baron, peering out, beheld a thing which surprised him almost as much as the sight of the face on the wall of the other ravine had surprised old Floating Star.

The man, staring at the mule and groaning, flicked his right eye upward, with a most peculiar jerk.

The baron had never seen that happen to but one eye, and it was the eye of a white man.

Further confirmation of his quick suspicion came when the man rose with an angry oath, and, swearing at the mule in most vigorous English, rushed upon it to give it a beating.

But Toofer was looking for something of the kind, and was duly prepared.

He changed ends again, and planted another resounding kick. This time, after sailing through the air for three or four yards, the feathered and painted individual did not rise.

"Idt iss some time to schlide," whispered the baron, rising from his place of concealment. "I am making myself now scarce, or pooty soon I cand't do idt. Toofer, vot I haf saidt in my haste idt vos a lie, when I saidt idt apoudt you."

He heard feet moving in the direction of the camp which he had thought a camp of Indians. But they did not move with more speed than the feet of the redoubtable baron and the nimble, twinkling hoofs of Toofer, the mule.

Before any one from the camp could reach the place, and long before the disguised white man regained consciousness, the German had fled from it on the mule's back.

The twisting and turnings of the ravine hid him from the men who had rushed in, to find their leader stretched out in unconsciousness.

They saw the tracks of the mule, and a few of them chased along on foot after it, without coming in sight of it. The others turned their attention to the man suffering from the mule's kicks.

Five minutes passed before he came round, and then he began to rave, cursing the mule.

"The owner must be round somewhere," he said. "It's that Dutchman's beast, and he must have had it tied in here; though it was loose when I saw it. Well, it knocked me out."

He fell back, groaning.

CHAPTER V.

FISHER'S RECAPTURE.

Rejoining Buffalo Bill and Little Cayuse, Baron von Schnitzenhauser was given an opportunity to rehearse his startling discovery. But before he could finish it, Pawnee Bill rode up.

"It's the baron's proverbial luck again," Buffalo Bill declared.

"Idt iss a luckiness dot I am nodt losing Toofer, ennyhow," the baron admitted. "Unt anodder luckiness iss dot when I ride me oudt oof dare I am nodt seen py anyoof budt der mool."

"Budt I vill exblanation to you."

Thereupon he told his story in full.

"As soon as I seen me dot eye I knowed him," the baron averred. "Dare iss nodt anodder eye like idt. Und den der schvear vords; no Inchun could do idt so natcherel as him. Unt der woice! Idt vos der woice oof him, dot Bill Fisher."

"Deserted Jericho!" Pawnee Bill exclaimed. "Those rascals are getting overbold, necarnis. I reckon it's up to us to put a reef in their flying topsails, eh?"

"What they are trying to do is clear enough," said the scout. "They want to create a war scare, so that troopers will be sent, and a collision be brought about between the reds and the troopers. One brush is certain to be followed by another, and then we'll have all the horrors of a border war, with houses burning and men and women killed and captured. Of course, the Sioux will be whipped to pieces in the end, but the American people will have been so wrought up that they'll have no more patience with them; and then this scheme to take their lands away and send them farther west will go through Congress with a rush. I'd hate to see it."

"If reds were only sensible, like white folks," said Pawnee Bill, twisting his face awry and digging into the top of his Stetson for a cigar. "But, of course, if they were, they wouldn't be reds."

"Floating Star and the chiefs of the tribe will stand for a fight, and they will fight like devils if they think they have to. And while this fake raiding is going on, and they fear the coming of soldiers, they will never return to the reservation."

"It's a neat scheme to do 'em," Pawnee Bill admitted. "I'd like to take Fisher by the heels again."

"Perhaps we can," said the scout. "Shall we let the baron guide us, and take a turn over in the direction where he had that bit of adventure? Some of the pretended redskins may be hanging round there still."

"Oof you do dot, petter you look oudt vor der ampuscades," the baron warned. "Oof dhey seen you, idt vill pe, 'Valk indo mein barlor, saidt der spider mit der fly.'"

"We'll risk it," was the declaration of Buffalo Bill; "we've got to nip this thing in the bud."

They rode off in the direction pointed out by the baron

—Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, the baron, and Little Cayuse.

When the place was approached, they dismounted, and, leaving the horses in charge of the Piute, they advanced carefully on foot.

"Idt iss to pe remempered," the baron reminded, "dot dhey ditn't seen me, budt seen der mool."

This was so true, that Fisher had been a very much-puzzled man, after his unpleasant mix-up with Toofer's heels; and his men had been as much puzzled as Fisher.

They did not doubt that the mule had been left there by its owner, and Fisher had recognized the beast as one he had seen the baron riding.

It was a safe guess for them, therefore, that Schnitzenhauser was in the vicinity; and that indicated the proximity likewise of Buffalo Bill.

Yet Fisher's men did not overtake the mule, nor see the man on his back. However, they were made so uneasy, that the cattle were driven out of the ravine, and hurried to what was deemed a safer place. All the raiders but Fisher went with the cattle.

He remained to look the ground over.

Thinking that if he encountered, or was seen by, any of Buffalo Bill's men, he would be safer without his Indian paint and feathers, he made a quick change in his personal appearance. Hauling some clothing out of a cache, he shifted into it, after removing his Indian make-up.

But, unable to discover anything there, he rode on in the direction of the temporary village of the Sioux, of whose location he was well aware.

Buffalo Bill and his companions struck Fisher's trail soon after it left the ravine, and, seeing that he was heading toward the village, they hustled back and got their horses.

Then they followed him.

Floating Star's closest friend and adviser, the Sioux war chief, Pine Knot, who in the old days had led more than one bloody raid against the white men, but was now an advocate of peace, for the reason that he knew raiding was no longer wise or safe, was out on a bit of level prairie that nature had somehow tucked into the midst of the Bad Lands, his purpose being to watch the country to the eastward.

As Pine Knot thus watched, a white man came riding toward him, emerging into the prairie from some low ground on his right.

Pine Knot knew that the man was one of the boomer leaders, and he frowned, fingering for the hatchet he had under his blanket.

He would not retreat, though the white man came straight toward him. To retreat before a number of white men might on occasion be the part of wisdom, but Pine Knot scorned to retreat before one.

So he held his head high and stood sullenly in his tracks, his eagle eyes searching the white man's face when he drew near, to discover there his motive.

The man, of course, was Fisher, riding toward the village; and, seeing the chief right before him, he thought it a good time to do some more intimidating.

So he rode at the chief, with the high-handed notion of riding him down.

Such a course would so bruise the temper of the Indian, as well as his body, that it might result in the chief

calling out his warriors and striking angrily at all white men who came near him.

And that was a thing which Fisher very much desired should happen. If the Indians could be goaded into fighting, then the purpose of their enemies would seem close to accomplishment.

Instead of trying to get out of the way, the old war chief folded his arms defiantly on his coppery chest.

"Get out o' my road," howled Fisher.

The chief still did not move.

But Nemesis was close on Fisher's heels, though he had not thought of it. He saw the chief smile, which angered him, as it seemed to indicate that the redskin was not afraid of him, and scorned his boasting and threats.

The thing which made old Pine Knot smile was that at the moment he beheld Nemesis, in the shape of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill.

The boomer king, as Fisher had been called, though in reality he was only a desperado of the worst type, yelled again at the chief; and that yell, with the beating noise of his horse's hoofs, kept him from hearing the rather soft-footed but swift approach of the daring scouts.

They were closing in, having come in from a side gulch not far off.

"You red fool!" screamed Fisher. "Git out o' my way, or I'll ride over ye. You won't? Then hyer you git it—hoop-la!"

Buffalo Bill had loosed his lariat, and was mentally calculating the distance.

Then it shot out, and it dragged the boomer king from his deep saddle as he was about to ride down the defiant chief.

Fisher struck the ground with a heavy jolt. As he looked up, dazed and half stunned by his unexpected fall, he saw the two scouts dash up beside him.

As Fisher's horse now showed signs of bolting, Pawnee Bill's noose got in its work, and the horse went down close beside its fallen rider.

The chief still stood as if rooted to the spot, that smile widening on his coppery visage.

Then he whirled round and was gone like a shot, not waiting to thank the men who had befriended him.

"Whoob!" came a yell, floating over the grass, and, twisting his head, the disgusted and angry boomer saw more men coming—the baron and Little Cayuse.

"I suppose," said Buffalo Bill, leaping down to make sure that the noose holding the captured rascal was not thrown off by him, "that you weren't looking for any little game like that?"

Fisher flung an oath at him.

Pawnee Bill, taking a quick turn of his rope round the legs of Fisher's horse, hobbled the beast neatly, then let it go. But as it could move only with short steps, there was not the least danger that it would stray far.

Now he turned to the captive and to Buffalo Bill.

"Good work, necarnis," he said approvingly.

Fisher tried to lift himself on his elbow, while one hand felt for the revolver sagging at his waist.

"Better not try it," Pawnee Bill warned, dropping a hand to one of his knives. "I'd hate to have to lame you with this."

Boiling with rage and chagrin, Fisher broke forth in a torrent of angry imprecations.

And as he glared and raged, his game eye flicked up—

ward, and back again, as if he had apparently lost muscular control of it.

The baron sat on his mule, looking at him.

"Idt iss vot I am recognizing you py, when you seen me," he observed gravely. "No Inchuns haf an eye vot yoomp roundt like dot."

"Man-with-the-flying-eye," said Little Cayuse, applying the name he had heard the Indians use when speaking of Fisher.

CHAPTER VI.

PAWNEE BILL'S PLAN.

That night Bill Fisher lay in double irons in the agency jail, with a strong guard of Indian police thrown round it, as the agent feared an attempt at rescue by his friends.

Other Indian police guarded the agency buildings, for Fisher's friends might, it was feared, fire them, hoping to create thereby an excitement which would enable them to break the jail.

Unfortunately, Glover's Indian police had been dwindling in numbers; certain of them had abandoned him in this critical time, and had taken themselves to their brethren in the Bad Lands.

Within the agency headquarters, Major Glover and his friends discussed the situation. The agent was anxious and troubled.

"I'm afraid I shall have to send to Fort Leatherman for the troopers," he groaned. "It's a thing I've been fighting against, and don't want to do."

"And if the troopers are sent here," said Buffalo Bill, "then all efforts to end this trouble peaceably will come to a sudden end. A lot of them hate the redskins."

"An' ye cain't blame 'em," said Nomad. "They has seen their comrades fall hyar an' thar, wi' Injun arrers in 'em, an mutilated in a way thet ye cain't speak of."

"And the Indians hate the troopers," added Pawnee Bill. "So there you have it."

"An'," Nomad added, "white men what paint up and play Injuns is a good deal wuss rattlesnakes than ther real variety."

"Toofer," said the baron, tamping the tobacco in his pipe—he had not been attentively listening—"he iss so vise a mool dot to-nighdt he haf a double feedt oof oadts."

"Who's torkin' erbout mules an' oats?"

"I am, you pedt me; me an' Toofer."

"Looks like," said Nomad, addressing Buffalo Bill, "thet thar might be work fer me an' Little Cayuse; we c'd pick out ther trail o' them cattle, an' tharby mebbeso find ther hidin' place o' these make-believe reds. It'd pay."

"Not a bad idea," admitted Pawnee Bill. "But a plan has hit me, necarnis, which I'm turning over in my mind. It's this: I'll disguise myself and play boomer. We've got to get on the inside of this affair, or we can't find out who is doing the dirty work. Over at the boomer camp are a whole lot of honest men, who are there because they have been made to think this Indian land will soon be opened to settlement; and with them are a few cut-throats and desperadoes of the Bill Fisher stripe. Fisher's men have elbowed in, and are now considered the

leaders of the boomers—because it is too often the way with honest men, that they will stand back and let a lot of loud talkers take the lead.

"But so long as we don't know just who are the desperadoes and who are the honest men we are handicapped. Of course, if that trail could be followed, and then the desperadoes who are playing Indian could be got into a corner and shot to pieces, or captured, it would be a simple way to turn the trick of exposing them and all that. But it's not going to be easy to do. For trailing in the Bad Lands is about as serious and disheartening work as can be imagined. Strike a trail there, and for a while it will be like a wagon road; then, inside of half a mile, it will end altogether. We have all had a hand in it, and we know."

"I think," interposed Nomad again, "thet me an' Little Cayuse c'd make progress even thar; I'm willin' ter tackle et ag'in, anyhow."

"I think Pard Cody will be willing to let you have another whack at it, old Diamond, and I hope you win out. But I'm still thinking this other plan promises something good."

"Lay it out for us all complete," said Major Glover, the Indian agent.

"That's all there is to it. I could disguise myself, I think, so that my best friend and my worst enemy wouldn't know me; and I could smuggle myself into the boomer camp without any trouble. That part would be a cinch. For, you see, new men are joining the boomers every day. They've nearly doubled their number since news of the trouble here on the reservation has been spread abroad in the newspapers."

Glover anathematized the newspapers.

"I've ordered the Indian police to take every reporter by the scruff of the neck and pitch him over the boundary, when found here on the reservation," he declared. "They're setting the whole country on fire. Everywhere the people think that a regular Indian war is on out here, and I've had dozens of telegrams from friends, far and near, and a few from headquarters, urging me to call for troopers and protect the settlers. Bah! If they'll let me alone I'll settle this muddle—with the help of you and Cody, I mean. We don't need anything but to be let alone a little while. But if this newspaper yowling keeps on, we will have a war, for sure; just because trouble hunters are swarming on us from all four quarters."

"Well, how does my plan strike you, major?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"As being about as dangerous a thing as could be attempted."

"That is the way it strikes me," Buffalo Bill declared. "But Pawnee Bill, you know, major, seems always to be hunting the spot light of danger."

"Only when I think I can make good, necarnis."

Leaning back in his chair, puffing at his cigar, Pawnee Bill did not look to be a man who was seriously thinking of taking his life in his hand at that moment.

"I'll add this to my plan," he said. "It's just come to me. In addition to spotting who the real trouble makers are, so that they can be arrested, if this Indian make-believe business goes on still, after Fisher's capture, what's to hinder me from joining that, too? And it might be possible for me to get word through to you when I know that a cattle raid is on; and then I could trust you and Buffalo Bill to do your part."

"You mean," said Glover, "you'd lead 'em into a bottle somewhere off in the Bad Lands, and we would then be able, maybe, to slip up and put the stopper in the bottle?"

"That's just what I mean."

"There would be a dead Pawnee Bill if they tumbled to it, even after the bottling was accomplished."

"All of us have to take risks," said Pawnee Bill composedly.

"I'm telling you it will be a mighty big——"

All came to their feet, for a fall had sounded outside, and a fight seemed in progress there.

Buffalo Bill reached the door first.

"Look out," Glover warned. "It may be a ruse to call you outside and shoot you. Recollect that Fisher's pards are equal to anything."

Nevertheless, the scout flung the door open and leaped through, followed closely by Pawnee Bill and Nomad. Glover and the baron, with Little Cayuse, were not far behind.

The sounds had ceased; but a moment later they heard a patter of feet, and then the clatter of a horse breaking into a rapid canter.

The guards round the prison called through the darkness, and some of the Indian police who had been supposedly watching the house came hurriedly upon the scene.

"Make a search down by the wall there," bellowed Glover. "We thought a fight was going on there!"

A lantern flashed in the hands of one of the police, and a search was made, the result of which was that a man, whose first appearance indicated that he was a member of the reservation police force, was brought into the light.

He wore the half-military clothing of the police, but when the lantern was held down close to his face, it was seen that he wore a mustache, and was a white man in Indian disguise.

As he was unconscious, he was brought into the agency, and laid on the floor.

Water being dashed into his face, he revived, and sat up with a start of alarm. For the moment he had forgotten that he was a make-believe Indian, and began to mutter in English.

"Thet's right," said Nomad. "Spit et out ef et's hurtin' ye."

The man came more clearly to a recognition of his position, and shrank against the wall.

"You're a white man," said Glover, "and a stranger to me; yet I find you disguised as one of my Indian police. I think it will pay you to make a full confession."

This the rascal refused to do."

"You came here, knocked out or killed one of my men, and shifting into his clothing, you have been spying on us, while pretending to be one of the agency guards. We know that much. So you had better tell the rest of it."

But the man obstinately refused to make a statement.

Even when they washed away the paint and questioned him again he was obdurate.

The agent, who had been more than once in the boomer camp, felt sure he had seen the man there, and that the fellow was a pretended boomer, and no doubt one of the followers of Bill Fisher.

"We got your leader in slings to-night," said Glover,

"and right in there you go, too. Maybe after you've thought it over you will be willing to talk."

So he was taken to the jail.

The guard being called up, all of them, it was found that two were missing. When a search was made, they were found bound and gagged out by the corral.

They could give very little explanation of how it had happened, beyond the statements that they had been assaulted in the darkness, tied up, and their clothing taken away.

When found they were nearly naked, and suffering severely from the cold.

"There were two spies here," said Glover. "We heard one ride away, and here is the other. But what did that fighting mean, if it was fighting? Did the two rascals quarrel and proceed to a punching bout right here under the agency windows?"

It seemed so, though, after all, the thing was hardly credible.

But as no better conclusion could be reached at the time, they let it go at that.

CHAPTER VII.

PAWNEE BILL AND BUMPTIOUS BASIL.

Pawnee Bill departed from the agency some time after midnight.

Before morning he was on the reservation border, on the east.

He made dry camp, and bunked down in his blanket without any fire, even though the frost of the early morning hours was sharp.

The horse he had with him was not his old, reliable Chick-Chick, but an Indian cayuse. It was an ugly animal, with an ear that dropped over comically, showing that the cartilage had been eaten away by the screw-worm. In color it was what Nomad called a "brindle," a nondescript sort of roan. But it had good traveling capacity, and that was the real thing required. The Indian agent had furnished it, and as it was like so many other Indian ponies, Pawnee Bill had little fear that it could betray his identity.

In his own personal appearance he had made a complete and most remarkable change. Discarding his Stetson and ordinary clothing, he was garbed now much like a farmer from the flat lands of Illinois, or perhaps Missouri. And the dust of the night ride, together with the fact that he gave his clothing a chance to come in contact with the soil before he "bogged down" for the remainder of the night, and stretched out in them, conferred a certain miry grime and wrinkles that were characteristic.

But the greatest change was in his face. His mustache was drawn out into waxed ends, and drooped down over his mouth, and his face had been darkened until it was in color like a Mexican's.

He intended to represent himself as a "Texican," half farmer and half cowman, from the borders of the Rio Grande.

As the sun rose and Pawnee Bill stirred in his blanket, he saw coming toward him over the level land a figure that looked familiar.

Sitting up with the blanket hooded round him, he studied the horseman.

"Bumptious Basil," he said. "Now, what is he doing here?"

The tatterdemalion figure came galloping on, astride a crow-bait horse that was as shiftless in appearance as the rider.

His wide mouth and round face were laughing as he drew in beside Pawnee Bill.

"Well, now, this is good," he cackled. "I thought it was you right off."

This was somewhat surprising, in view of Pawnee Bill's disguise.

But he thought that perhaps Bumptious Basil was mistaking him for some one else; so he did not comment on that, naturally.

The tattered figure slid to the ground, and, letting the reins of his horse trail, he swung round and squatted down at Pawnee Bill's side.

"You know me," he said, "and of course I know you."

"Whom do you think I am?" Pawnee Bill asked.

"Well, I dunno what name you're travelin' under, but I know you for Pawnee Bill."

"You're sure of that?"

Bumptious Basil cackled.

"Dead sure," he said; "and I'll tell you why. Put two and two together, an' it makes four, don't it? Well, that's what I done."

"Now I know, too, what you're doin' here, and where you're goin'. So I'll jest be frank with ye, fer I think we two can pull together. Make a mighty good team, me and you."

"It's this way," he said confidentially. "That was me over at the agency, when that cat-and-dog fight started, which brought you and your crowd crow hoppin' to the door."

"I reckon that Cody told you all about meetin' up with me over in the Bad Lands, when that old medicine man was doin' his song and dance round the poles he'd stuck in the sand. He called me 'Bumptious Basil,' then, which is the name that has been tucked onto me by some people; seems he'd heard of me."

"Well, I ain't all that I seem. You ain't, neither, right now." He stopped to cackle again. "There's a lot more playin' tricks similar, all round these diggin's. I might mention the boomers that's playin' the game of bad Injun; an' there are heaps of others."

"But jest fer the present, I'll say that I tagged out after Buffalo Bill's crowd yesterday, and reached the agency some time after they did; after dark, it was. My horse I hid out; and then I walked up to the buildin's."

"It was my intention at first to have a talk with Cody, or the agent; but I found that somethin' crooked was on with the guards, and while lookin' into that I delayed."

"But I'll say I found that white men were playin' Injun police; the way I come to know it bein' that I heard 'em talkin'—two of 'em. Now, a white man's voice ain't never to be mistaken for an Injun's; and then an Injun, one of these reservation kind, never gits his English down as good as they had it."

"I had slipped up to the piazza, to listen, when I heard 'em talking."

"Says I to myself, 'I'll look into this fuder!' and I pulled myself up to the piazza. Then I bumped against one of the fake Injun police. It scared him, and he backed away, without jest knowin' whether I was a white man or an Injun."

"While he was standin' off figurin' that out I stuck my ear against the winder there, and heard what you was sayin'."

He looked at Pawnee Bill keenly.

"You ain't sayin' nothin'," he grumbled.

"You seem to be taking up all the time. Go ahead."

"You still think I ain't sure of you; but I am. Well, anyway, I heard you say you was goin' to take the lopped-eared cayuse, and hit for the boomer camp, with the intention of foolin' 'em."

Pawnee Bill successfully concealed the start this gave him.

"What troubles me is, that I ain't sure but mebbe them pretended Injun police heard the same thing," the man went on. "I'm hopin' they didn't. But the one I skeered away from the wall came back, and we tackled, and had a fight. Then I flew for the high places."

He studied Pawnee Bill.

"But however that is, you're hyer, an' you're goin' to try to make the raffle."

He stopped for an answer.

"You ain't confessin' nothin'," he cackled again. "Well, that don't fool me none. One way I made sure it was you, was that I wasn't so very far off when you straddled that cayuse an' hit the trail comin' this way. I follered ye, but fur enough behind, so's you wouldn't notice it none at all. And to make double sure, I had muffled the hoofs of my horse."

"You p'inted your nose so straight that it was easy to come along after you. Right near here I heard your cayuse stop, and I rightly guessed that you was goin' into camp."

"So I jest gently rid off a goodish distance, and camped down, too. And then, when day come, I ambles over here; and, sure enough, it's you, but togged out plumb wonderful."

"Now, because I recognized ye, don't go to thinkin' that anybody else is likely to; fer they ain't. And it ain't because I'm so wonderfully smarter'n other folks, either. It's because I heard your plan, saw which way you come, heard you bog down here, and then found you here."

"I told you that I put two and two together, and it made four; it always does if they're put together right."

He looked hard at the silent scout.

"So you can rest easy," he assured him, bending forward and tapping Pawnee Bill's shoulder with his forefinger. "Your git-up is that excellent it'd fool anybody what wasn't on. If I didn't know, I should guess that you was a sort of cross betwixt a Mexican greaser and a Missouri mule driver; it's complete."

But no smile came to the dark face before him—only a stony stare.

Bumptious Basil laughed again in his peculiar cackling way.

"You've told me a good deal," said Pawnee Bill, breaking his long silence, "but I've noticed that you haven't told me your name."

"Bumptious Basil."

"You're called that, you say; but that isn't your name."

"Basil Trent."

"And that isn't your name!"

"Wow! Well, mebbe it ain't. But, knowin' you, I ain't afraid to show you my credentials."

His hand went into his coarse flannel shirt, and extracted an envelope, out of which he took a paper bearing an official seal.

"Jest let your optics glimmer over that," he requested. Pawnee Bill, looking at the writing and the seal, saw that it purported to be a commission issued by the Indian department; and it stated that Basil Benton was engaged as a secret service man to look into certain matters concerning the Indians. It had a true ring, and the signatures, he saw, were genuine.

"That's me," said Bumptious Basil.

"You're an educated man?"

"Not to hurt; anyway, not so's you'd notice it. But what's that got to do with it; I ain't qualified to teach Greek, ner ancient langwiges, but when it comes to the little old detec business, I'm there with the goods."

Pawnee Bill again looked him over carefully.

"If found on you, that certificate is going to get you into trouble," he remarked.

"Not now," said Basil, and scratched a match. "I've jest been hangin' onto it until I could git to flash it on you or Buffalo Bill. I wanted you to know."

"You say you met him in the Bad Lands?"

"Not under circumstances callin' fer its exhibition. But here she goes."

He applied the burning match to his commission, and held it flaming in his fingers until it was so far consumed that he could trust it to burn to ashes, then he cast it on the ground.

"That settles that danger," he said, "and I'm glad that you seen me do it."

He ground the ashes with his heel into the earth.

"There ye aire. And now I hope we can talk business, for we're in the same work. We want to stop this raidin', and help the Injuns, and knock the spots out of the desperadoes that are makin' cat's-paws out of the land boomers. Am I setting it forth right?"

He eyed the disguised scout, but seemed not at all anxious or doubtful that he would be believed.

While considering the matter, Pawnee Bill came near doing a characteristic thing. He had a cigar in the crown of his hat, which he reached for; but he caught himself in time, so appeared to have put up his hand to scratch his ear reflectively.

His conclusion favored Bumptious Basil.

"As you know me," he said, "we'll pass that up. How can we work together?"

The fat face before him beamed.

"That's the talk—that's gittin' right down to brass tacks! Well, now, we'll have to be governed by conditions, I reckon. I'm goin' into that camp; in fact, I been there already more than once, and I'm considered one of the boomers. I'm workin' into the confidence of Fisher's crowd, and expect to be asked to go with them when they make their next raid. They cal'late to raid right along, and stir up the settlers; because the settlers will think it's the work of Injuns. Whenever I git the chance I'll tip ye news on any plans I have. And if you feel that I'm the clean article you can reeciprocate. How's that?"

It seemed all right, and Pawnee Bill said so.

"What's goin' to be yer name there?"

"As I'm likely to change it, we'll pass that up, too. We'll meet as strangers, and whatever name I'm introduced to you under will be the one I have adopted."

"That's all right, too. Well, I'm Bumptious Basil, or Basil Trent; ye can't fail to remember that."

He rose from the ground.

"Now, I'm goin' to hike out. The sun is gittin' well

up, ye see, an' it's best we ain't seen together. We don't want to go into that boomer camp together, if we're to meet as strangers. An 'don't worry about that disguise; it's a good one."

He straddled the crow-bait horse, and cantered away.

When he was out of sight Pawnee Bill mounted the lop-eared cayuse and rode off in the other direction.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE BOOMER CAMP.

Pawnee Bill did not enter the boomer camp until near nightfall.

In the meantime he had thought over the statements of Bumptious Basil, and had reached the conclusion that on his part it would have been wiser if he had delayed admitting the things which the fellow claimed.

Wagons were parked round the camp, wheels to wheels, in a manner to admit of a hurried defense in case of an attack by Indians.

Within this inclosure were a number of tents. But as nearly all the wagons were hooded with sheets of white canvas, and so were in a measure storm-proof, the boomers in general slept in them.

Fires were blazing and the evening meal was in process of preparation when Pawnee Bill came in.

One of the boomer leaders, recognized as a Fisher follower, came up to him at once, and others looked at him expectantly.

"Land seeker?" said this individual.

"That's what I'm here fer," said Pawnee Bill, dropping easily into the vernacular of the Southwest. "I reckon if Uncle Samuel has got any one hundred and sixty acres of good soil, now the property of Indians, what he's willin' to give away as soon as them thieves is off o' it, I'm the man that's lookin' for that quarter section."

"Same yere," said the man, and he put out his hand. "Been a lot o' men come in to-day," he added. "What's yer handle?"

"Sam Bass."

The man grinned.

"Used to be a famous cowboy w'arin' that name," he said. "Thar's a lot of range songs been made up about him. It's a mighty good name. I answer to 'Bill Stevens,' whenever the supper bell is ringin'. Come along, an' I'll introduce ye to some of the boys."

Leading his cayuse by the bridle, Pawnee Bill was drawn up to one of the fires.

Bumptious Basil sat there, eying him, but not a gleam of recognition passed between them.

Stevens proceeded to introduce Sam Bass to the company at the fire.

"This here is Bumptious Basil," said Stevens, "which we call him that because he belongs to the goat tribe."

"The goat tribe?" echoed Pawnee Bill.

"He's allus buttin' in; that's why we use it, and why he w'ars it."

Bumptious Basil cackled.

"It's a fittin' name, stranger," he admitted, "but not edzackly a title o' praise; but so long's thar is a quarter section o' good land to look fer, an' the grub comes reg'-

lar, ye can call me whatever ye please. What is it the poit says:

"'A skunk by any other name would smell as bad!'"

Then he laughed again, but choked off the laugh by filling his mouth with a hot potato.

After a while Bumptious Basil kicked one of the men on the foot, to attract his attention, and winked boldly at Pawnee Bill.

"Stranger," he said, "if you're in a conversational mood, we'll do a bit o' torkin out hyar, fer the benefit o' our digestions."

Pawnee Bill strolled off from the camp fire with them, 'untill, coming to a wagon that had no one round it, they camped down on the wagon tongue. Night was over them, and the fires of the boomers flickered rubily.

"It's this way," said Bumptious Basil, leading off. "I reckon I seen you onct, down on the Brazos; recklect that summer me and some others war mixed up in that bank haul jest out of Austin, and we hiked from the Brazos' bottoms, with the sheriff chasin' us?"

"Yes, I remember that," said Pawnee Bill, falling in with the lie, though he did not see the drift.

"Seein' you to-night, I knowed you," beamed Basil, "and I whispered to the boys that you was O. K. Now, are you playin' it straight here, or aire ye on the make?"

"Any way, so it brings the spuds."

"That's what I thought, recklectin' what you said to me that time on the Brazos. Well, it's this way: There's a company backin' this boomer bizness—or backin' a certain crowd; the most of the boomers ain't on, ain't got sense enough to be, and likely couldn't be trusted.

"This is a land syndicate with a railway projeck strung at the tail of it. If the reservation is opened, they're goin' to build a town right in the middle of it, and as it will be the only one within seventy-five miles, it will be the county seat, and there is a show that we can lug the capital over to it, and make it the State capital when we git statehood.

"Not that you and me is carin' for that; we're after quicker profit. It's a hundred dollars a month, and a quarter section of land close by the new town for us, if the reservation is thrown open.

"To earn our money, we've got to keep the reds skeered and on the jump. If we can buck 'em into such a nervous fit that they'll take to the warpath, that's their finish; troopers will shoot 'em down, and jest wipe up the land with 'em. And then the reservation will go open; for white people won't stand it to have murderin' and scalpin' redskins inhabitin' a reservation right beside 'em, and ready to jump out an' go to swingin' tommy-hawks any minute. So that's the lay."

"It's a mighty cute one," Pawnee Bill, or, rather, Sam Bass, admitted.

"Sure it is. Already we've done some raidin'—Injun raidin', you understand. To-night we're to hit the red trail again. We don't shoot nobody, but we do a lot of Injun yellin', and then we run off cattle. The people thinks it's the work of excitable young Injun bucks, and they r'ar back and howl until they're heard clean into the White House and the Injun department at Washington."

"It's a play," commented Bass, "that I think would get the goods."

"Right-o. It's goin' to. Question is: Do you want that hundred a month, with the fringes?"

"Who wouldn't?"

"All right. We'll take you in. To-night we make it. You ain't got no disguises handy? Well, I'll see to that; I'll git you an Injun layout, chiefly a blanket, and a pot of paint, and a yard of rooster feathers fixed up to look fierce; and there ye aire. Eleven o'clock sharp that caravan moves. You be ready."

He and his friend shook hands solemnly with Pawnee Bill, to bind the arrangement; then they shuffled away.

"Luck's favorin' me, if——"

Pawnee Bill sat on the wagon tongue, meditating.

"If," he concluded, "Bumptious Basil is a man that I can trust."

Still, having gone so far, he had no notion now of backing out. Whatever happened he would put the game through.

CHAPTER IX.

STARTLING NEWS.

When it came to Indian trailing, scouting, and work of that kind, Buffalo Bill knew of no one more likely to do it in a trustworthy and creditable manner than Little Cayuse and old Nomad.

Hence, they were kept pretty busy, in watching the Indians camped in the Bad Lands, and the troublesome white men camped on the edge of the reservation.

But, inasmuch as Little Cayuse had not many days before fallen under the evil influence of certain red renegades, who might be supposed to try to regain their power over him if they had a chance, the Piute was assigned the work of watching the reservation border next the boomer camp, while the Bad Lands district was given to Nomad.

There were a few hills on the eastern border, and to these the Piute was accustomed to ride while yet the night hung black. Then he would conceal his pinto cayuse, Navi, and, mounting to the top of one of the hills, he would lie there stretched flat on his stomach watching whatever came within the field of his vision.

He was thus engaged when he was given a prodigious surprise.

From another hilltop, less than fifty yards off, an arrow shot into the air, and, describing a graceful parabola, dropped on the hilltop occupied by Little Cayuse, and close at his feet.

Instead of stretching forth his hand to snatch the arrow, to which he saw something was attached, the Piute flattened out like a basking lizard, and fixed his beady eyes on the other hill.

His slim brown hand drew from his blanket a revolver, and rested it beside him.

"Ugh!" he grunted.

But not a thing moved; apparently the arrow had risen from a point beyond the top of the other hill, so that whoever had sent it had a good chance to slide backward and downward without being seen by the Piute.

For five minutes or so Little Cayuse trained his keen eyes on the hilltop, without discovering anything. But certain conclusions were inevitable. The fact that he was up there watching was known to some one, and that

some one had fired the arrow. Also, that some one had not really tried to drive the arrow into him. If that had been tried, the arrow would have come straight across.

The Piute, being densely superstitious, began to shake inwardly. This had a look of things mysterious, and he did not like that. As no man could be seen, and apparently no man could know he was hiding there, it seemed likely to his unsophisticated brain that a spirit had pulled a spirit bow, and landed the arrow before him.

But when he looked at the arrow he saw that it was matter-of-fact enough. It was a typical Indian arrow, with a steel head thin as a knife blade, and a slender wooden shaft tipped with guiding feathers. And the paper coiled round it and bulging in the center was also material paper.

Having satisfied himself of this, and being unable to see the Bowman, Little Cayuse ventured to crawl on his belly to the arrow and take it in his hand.

But he did not lift his head, being too cautious for that.

Snuggling to the ground as closely as possible, he again looked at the arrow.

"Sioux," he thought, as he noted the marks on the shaft and the peculiar manner in which the feathers and the steel head had been attached.

A few of the Sioux, but not many, still stuck to their antiquated bows and arrows, probably for the reason that guns were often hard to get. No Indian was so backward in knowledge that he did not know the white man's fire tube could shoot faster and truer and harder than any bow ever turned by the cunning hand of an Indian.

Having seen that it was a Sioux arrow, the assumption was easy that a Sioux had shot it.

But what was the object that bulged the paper?

He almost feared to tear the paper from the shaft to find out.

When he had done so, and the paper fell open, disclosing its contents, Little Cayuse recoiled with a cry of fright. For out of the paper had dropped a severed human ear.

It was the ear of a white man, that was plain, though it was now blackened.

"Ugh!" the Piute grunted, making passes in the air to ward off evil spirits. "Me no sabe this."

There was writing on the paper. Anything that approached printed matter the Piute could struggle with in the hope of getting at its meaning; but this ragged writing was too much for him.

He stared at it, and at the ear, gripped by a feeling of horror.

Before he had recovered from the start given him, he heard a distant clatter of pony hoofs, which seemed to indicate that the man who had fired the arrow had gained the bottom of the hill, and was riding away.

Action right then was much better than contemplation of the gruesome object before him, and the Piute welcomed it. So, leaving the arrow, the paper, and the severed ear on the ground, he slipped backward down the hill.

Having reached the bottom without loss of time, he ran swiftly toward the farther end of the hill, in the hope of seeing the mysterious horseman. He saw him, when he came out at the end of the hill; but by that time the

horseman was so far off that all Little Cayuse could determine was that he was a white man.

His manner of riding, as well as his clothing, showed that. An Indian rides usually without a saddle, and with only a horsehair rope reeved round the lower jaw of his beast; and he tucks his feet under his cayuse's belly, with a forward crouch like that of a swift-riding jockey.

But this man rode upright, in a deep saddle, with his feet straight down in stirrups, rising and falling only with the rise and fall of his horse, after the fashion of the Western rider. So he was a white man, without doubt, Little Cayuse determined.

The only question remaining could only be determined by clever crawling and scouting. That was the question whether this was the white man who had sent that arrow with its gruesome load.

To settle this, Little Cayuse scuffled along at the base of the hill, keeping well concealed, until he came to the hill from which the arrow had risen.

There he swung round it in a semicircle, which soon brought him to the opposite side, where he went up with lizard wriggles, and with no more noise than a gliding lizard would have made.

When he gained the top, still crawling stealthily, he looked for the Bowman. But the top of the hill was now untenanted.

Having finally satisfied himself of this, Little Cayuse wriggled on until he came to the point from which the arrow had been shot. Here he examined the ground minutely.

The fellow had been wary and cautious, and had left few signs, but these the Piute picked up readily, and read them like an open page.

The white man had worn hobnailed, heavy shoes, and his hands were big and coarse. The imprints of the hobnails, and one big thumb and part of a palm, were in the soil.

He had not been there long, for the few spears of trampled grass had not been a great while beaten down. Also, he had but recently fled; a fact shown by the grass tufts on which he had reclined—they had not been given time since to erect themselves.

"Ugh!" the Piute grunted, looking these things over. "White man shoot um arrow; see Little Cayuse, mebbeso. But where git um ear? He no sabe."

There was no dead man near, nor any indication of one.

When apparently nothing more was to be discovered, the Piute lost no time in hustling across to the other hill, where the queer message and its queerer contents had been left.

They were there undisturbed.

For a full minute the Piute stood regarding the blackened ear, almost determined to leave it there. But he was sure that the message concerned it, and that a singular story in connection with it would doubtless be unfolded. Therefore it was his duty to take it to Pa-e-has-ka.

Having decided that, he tucked the arrow, the paper, and the dismembered ear into a fold of his blanket; then transferred them to his saddle pouch, when he had reached his cayuse.

"Pa-e-has-ka see, Pa-e-has-ka know," he muttered.

Then he sprang to the back of Navi and galloped

wildly for the agency. Fortunately, Buffalo Bill was there, with Major Glover, and also old Nomad, who had just returned from the Bad Lands region.

They were in good spirits. The transfer of Bill Fisher and of the man captured who had been disguised as an Indian scout had been made to the county jail without trouble.

The transfer had been done hurriedly, the prisoners being taken away by the Indian police, accompanied by the scout and the agent. A fight with Fisher's followers had been more than half anticipated, but as none had come, the conclusion was reached that news of Fisher's capture had not yet reached the camp of the boomers.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled, as Little Cayuse came up like the wind, driving Navi recklessly. "Suthin' has broke, by ther looks. 'Tain't yoosual fer thet Piute ter run hoss races without a good reason."

Buffalo Bill was thinking the same as he watched the Piute's swift advance.

Little Cayuse slid to the ground in front of Buffalo Bill, and with a swoop of his hand reached for the queer package reposing in the saddle pouch.

"Pa-e-has-ka see," he cried. "Me no sabe—me no cumtax."

Then he held up the arrow, the paper, and the severed ear.

"Er-waugh!" Nomad howled.

With a glance at the gruesome thing in the Piute's hand and at the arrow, the scout clutched the message and began to read it.

As he glanced down the ragged lines his face paled, then flushed, and an exclamation flew from his lips.

"Listen to this," he said.

Then he read:

"BUFFALO BILL: We have got your friend, Pawnee Bill, and the things what we aire goin' to do to him is in part expressed by this hyer ear, if you don't immejitely surrender our friend, Bill Fisher. We have cut it from Pawnee Bill's head, and send it to you with our compliments. In a day or so we will send the other ear. And then we'll begin sendin' fingers, and toes, and sech like little trifles, jest to let you know that we aire dead in earnest. You have, we hear, captured Bill Fisher, and have run him into the county jail. On the other hand, we have got hold of your friend Pawnee Bill, while he was pullin' the wool over our eyes, an' pretendin' to be one of us, and a farmer frum wayback. All right. If you can stand it to see yer friend hacked to pieces, as we're goin' to do, ride right on. If you feel otherwise, let Bill Fisher go. When you do, we'll release Pawnee Bill, what's left of him by that time. So the quicker you git a move on, the more thar will be left of your friend when these hyer little pleasantries aire over.

"(Signed,) BILL FISHER'S FRIENDS."

It was a startling letter, and with the grim object which had come with it filled with terrible suggestion.

Little Cayuse had stood trembling, holding the ear in his hand, as he listened to the words of the letter.

But now, as if it were a snake which had bitten him, he cast it from him.

"Ugh!" he howled.

Major Glover and Nomad had leaped forward, but stood hesitating.

Gravely Buffalo Bill stooped and lifted the ear from the ground.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled. Then again: "Er-waugh!"

His trembling fingers gripped the butt of a big revolver, and he glared round as if aching to shoot at something.

"This is a serious thing," said Glover.

"If true," said Buffalo Bill.

"You think it isn't true?"

Buffalo Bill was looking at the gruesome object.

"I think," he said slowly, "this ear never came from the head of a live man."

"No?"

Tears leaped to the eyes of Little Cayuse.

"Pawnee Bill dead, mebbeso?"

The baron, who had been at the stables, attending to the wants of his beloved Toofer, came into view. When he saw the ear his German blue eyes bulged.

"Vot iss? In der name oof—"

He stopped, gasping.

"We'd better go into your office, major," said the scout, "while we talk this over."

He had seen some of the Indian police casting scared glances at the blackened object he held up.

Gravely he carried it into the office of Major Glover, followed by his friends. Wonderingly and quietly they entered, and saw the scout lay the paper on the table, and on top of it the discolored ear.

All except Buffalo Bill seemed stupefied with horror as they sat down.

"Now, we'll hear Little Cayuse's story," said the scout; "but before he begins it I want to say that I do not believe this ear came from the head of Pawnee Bill."

"Thank Heaven for that opinion!" cried the agent.

"It seems to me it is too small and too crumpled."

"We'll hope you are right," said Glover, staring fascinated at it. "But such a—— Well, it might shrink, you know, and become slightly twisted out of shape, as that seems to be. Still——"

He could not find words.

Buffalo Bill motioned Little Cayuse to an empty chair at the opposite side of the table.

"We'll hear about this," he commanded. "Where did you get it?"

"Me watch um hill," said Little Cayuse. "'Nother hill close by. Arrow come over; fall by me. Then me see, but me no sabe."

"Did you see who shot it? It is a Sioux arrow."

"White man," said Little Cayuse. "Me hear um ride off; then git round hill and see. White man ride fast."

"You didn't see his face?"

"Very far off."

"Then it shows, what we knew, of course, that a white man sent it; and bears out the statements of that letter."

"Ther thing ter do," said Nomad savagely, "is jest to natcherly wipe out that crowd. Gimme my way, an' thar wouldn't be a grease spot left of 'em."

"This makes me feel the same," the scout admitted; "but until we know just who the followers of Bill Fisher are, we'd be hampered in trying that, to say nothing of the fact that we don't want to begin the killing business."

"Waugh! Not after thet?"

"I think," said the scout to Glover, "as I said, that ear was cut from the head of a dead man. And the dead

man was not Pawnee Bill. Fisher's friends have set in to run that on us as a bluff, hoping we'll free Fisher."

"But it proves, anyway," said the agent, "that the devils have got Pawnee Bill."

"I'm afraid so; yes, it looks it. His disguise didn't protect him. Or——"

"Well?"

"We captured a white man who had been playing Indian police, and we heard some one ride away. Probably that was another white man who had been in that game, and by listening he may have got the information that Pawnee Bill meant to disguise himself and visit the camp of the boomers. If so, of course, Pawnee Bill's disguise was useless; he was spotted when he came into the camp."

"Der kvestion I am asking meinselluf," said the baron, whose blue eyes still stared, "oof dhey haf cabtured him, vill dey pe likely to kill him, or oddervise?"

"No one can answer that?"

"Unt also-o, vouldn't idt pe der bardt oof visdom to ledt dot rascal vot you haf tooked py der chail go away kvick?"

"I don't like to compromise with such cattle," said Glover slowly, "but I suppose that is what we shall have to do. The news of Fisher's release would spread rapidly, and his friends would almost immediately hear of it. And then——"

"Could ye trust 'em?" howled Nomad. "Men what will make threats like that, and lie like thet, couldn't be expected to keep their word."

"I'm afraid that is true, too," said Glover dejectedly.

"Unt anodder t'ing iss clearer as daylightdts," added the baron. "Idt iss dot vot ve do iss common broberthy mit dhem outdlaws. Oddervise, how dit dhis arrow shooder know vare iss Liddle Cayuse py der hilltop on yedt already? When ve t'ink ve ar-re vatching dhem, dhye are yidt more closely vatching us. Dhey haf schmugled white men in here as der Inchun bolice, unt odder t'ings. So-o——"

He waved his fat hands.

"But aire we goin' ter lay down an' let 'em set on us?" said Nomad, banging his horny fist against the table. "You betcher not!"

"Often we have to do things which we dislike to do," said Glover.

Buffalo Bill, staring at the severed ear, had been doing some quick thinking.

"Of course," he said, voicing something of his thought, "if we guess, and go by that, we may blunder. Still, I have one thing to guide me—and that is my knowledge of my pard, Pawnee Bill. In the first place, while he is no doubt a prisoner, I don't believe he is dead, or that he has been injured. Fisher's friends know too well what would be the punishment for a thing of that kind, and they'd not take the risk. And if Pawnee Bill is living, even though held by them, he would have certain wishes, by which we ought to be guided."

"To arrive at them, though," said Glover, "would be difficult."

"I think I have done so. Pawnee Bill is a brave man, and a direct man. He is as much interested in laying those rascals by the heels as any one of us can be; he has shown it by the risks he has taken. And even though it imperiled his very life, he would want us to go right on with our plans. For one thing, we can be sure that

Pawnee Bill, no matter what his situation, would be utterly opposed to turning Bill Fisher out of that jail."

"Right ye aire, Buffler!" Nomad exploded.

"Der same here also-o," agreed the baron.

"Pawnee Bill heap brave," said the Piute, his black eyes shining.

"Pawnee Bill," said the scout, "would rather die, like the hero he is, than to be beaten in this thing, or to have us fail through any failure of his."

"Right ye aire, Buffler; thet's Pawnee Bill's size to a gnat's heel; you couldn't git him down finer."

"That being so," remarked Glover, "the plan ought to be pushed; I suppose that is what you mean. But I admit I am stalled."

"Of course," said the scout, "Fisher's men are not holding Pawnee Bill in that boomer camp. Though they seem to have got temporary control of matters there, they have done so by posing as honest men, not as the villains they are. So we may be sure that the honest boomers know nothing about this."

"Aber dot iss so, ve can pudt dhem vise," urged the baron.

"Yes, for one thing, we must do that; the honest boomers must be informed about the kind of men they have been harboring and following. This letter will do that trick, all right. They'll not want anything more to do with Fisher. The only trouble about that," he added, "is that probably they do not know themselves who are the scoundrels among them there; but they ought to be able to locate some of them. All they'd have to do would be to pick out men who have been closest to Fisher."

"But thet ain't reskyin' Pawnee," grumbled Nomad.

"If not held in the camp, he is held elsewhere."

"Ef fer shore thet ain't his year, an' he ain't dead!"

"If held elsewhere," the scout went on, "we're mighty poor stuff as trailers if we can't locate him."

"Right ye aire ag'in," Nomad agreed.

"And," the scout added grimly, "having located him, and them, we'll know how to act."

"Er-waugh! Right ye aire, Buffler. Jest give me and ther Piute ther word ter bergin work, an' you'll see us scratchin' gravel gittin' away frum this agency quick."

"Also-o," said the baron, but with the utmost calmness, "I am going alongk. I am listening to der calls oof excidementd already yedt. I pedt me dare vill pe some fightdting, oof der kinds vot iss der stuffin's vor Schnitzenhauser. Nomat, when you ar-re ready, yoost whistle me my name."

With the exception of Major Glover and his Indian police, all got out of there before another half hour had gone by.

CHAPTER X.

HITTING THE TRAIL.

Buffalo Bill had determined on a bold course.

Daybreak found him and his little party in the camp of the boomers. Their arrival there occasioned more than a little excitement, for many of the boomers, aware that they were looked on with suspicion, feared arrest.

The scout had brought the letter, the arrow, and the severed ear.

"Are any friends of Bill Fisher here?" he inquired, on riding into the camp.

Men looked at each other, but for a moment there was no response. Then a bearded boomer, who had the appearance of an honest man, stepped forward.

"Bill Fisher has been with us a good deal," he said, "and until lately I reckon he had a lot of friends 'mongst us; but it's now reported he has been playin' double, and is in jail."

"So he has no friends here now, I am to understand?" The boomer looked round.

Off at a little distance three men sat, who had been giving close attention. But they did not speak up. One of them drew out his knife and began to whittle, as if the matter did not concern him. But the scout believed these were close friends of Fisher, and he noted their appearance.

"Nobody seems to be speakin' up fer Fisher," said the boomer.

When the scout produced the Sioux arrow and then the letter, the three men got up and sauntered over. Other men had arrived, and the camp occupants began to drift toward the horsemen.

Buffalo Bill waited until the men were close about him; then he held up, one after the other, the arrow, the letter, and the severed human ear.

On beholding the ear the men gaped and stared.

"I want to read to you this letter," said the scout, "and then I shall ask again if 'Bill Fisher's friends,' or any of them, are here."

In a voice that could be heard through the crowd he read the grim demand of "Bill Fisher's friends."

"Bill Fisher," he added, as he folded up the letter, "was called the king of the boomers."

"Not lately," objected the boomer who had spoken. "Not sense we had begun to find him out."

"And," the scout went on, unheeding, "he is supposed still to have a number of friends in this camp. I'd like to see their faces."

He looked straight at the three men mentioned, but no one spoke.

"He seems to have no friends here, then?"

"He had heaps of 'em no longer than a day or two ago," declared old Nomad belligerently.

"Perhaps if he has no friends here," said the scout, "the friends he once had here may have friends." So I'll pass this word to them, and likely they will pass it on to 'Bill Fisher's friends.'

"Bill Fisher is in jail, and he will stay there for a while, and if certain things believed of him can be proved he will hang. That's one thing for his friends to know. Another is, that if Pawnee Bill is killed, as this letter threatens, every man that had a hand in it will be hunted down by me and my pards, if we have to give up the remainder of our lives to the work."

"Er-waugh!" Nomad yelped. "Right ye aire, Buf-fler!"

"Yaw," seconded the baron; "you may pedt me dot iss der troot."

"I want the friends of 'Bill Fisher's friends' to get that to them hotfooted, for we mean it. If a hair of Pawnee Bill's head is so much as harmed, the man that does it will die!"

"Er-waugh!"

"Now, we intend to trail these devils down," said the scout. "There will be no let-up."

He looked round, his eyes flashing, and again they swept with hot glances the three men he had spotted.

"What about that ear," a boomer asked. "It seems he's already been hurt."

"That is not his; we feel sure he is living, and the letter says that; moreover, that ear was cut from a dead man's head."

He looked round again.

"Has any one here knowledge of a man having been killed, or of a man dying?"

"We ain't," said the boomer.

"Some one of 'Bill Fisher's friends' has gone under; that is our guess," said the scout, "and that gave the others a chance to lift an ear, and send it to us with that threat."

He addressed the elderly man who stood before him.

"This boomer business is likely to get all of you into trouble," he warned. "This reservation will never be opened in answer to such high-handed and cutthroat methods as have been adopted. Remember that. So I want to say to all honest men who now hear me, that they are simply wasting their time here; besides, they are serving as a recruiting station for scamps and scoundrels, men of the Bill Fisher type. Take my advice, and get out of here before men of that type involve you in a lot of trouble with the United States Government and the Indian department."

But there was still no answer.

"Now we are going to take the trail, at the point where this message was shot to the Piute; send word of it to 'Bill Fisher's friends.' And when we get to the end of that trail, tell them we will find them there, and that there will be something interesting doing."

"Whoob!" bellowed the German, growing excited at last.

"Waal, thar will," echoed Nomad.

Little Cayuse sat on Navi, his face impassive. What thoughts lay behind his glowing black eyes were unreadable.

Buffalo Bill turned his horse about, and rode out of the boomer camp, his followers at his heels.

A minute later they had headed back toward the reservation.

Little Cayuse, guiding the party to the hills, where he had received so strangely that singular message, pointed to the hill he had occupied, then to the one from which the arrow had flown to him.

"Up there," he said laconically.

"And out from the base of that hill," said the scout, "you saw the white man riding?"

"All same true, Pa-e-has-ka."

Then we begin our work right there."

Though the trail was not of the best, and several hours had passed, Buffalo Bill and his trailers found small difficulty in picking it up. Of course, they were aided in this by Little Cayuse's memory of where it was to be found.

The trail was not difficult to follow while it clung to the level ground of the reservation, notwithstanding the horseman had taken pains to make it so. He had ridden in circles, which he bisected, and had shot off in acute angles.

It seemed at first that he had ridden toward the boomer camp, but after a while his eccentric trail headed toward the west.

Yet he had continued his antics of queer riding, to baffle a possible pursuit.

Having men of the Buffalo Bill stamp to deal with,

this availed him not at all, until he entered the Bad Lands.

There, on rocky ground, the trail was lost; not because the horseman had been clever, but simply because the rocks, of a flintlike character in that spot, held no record of hoofmarks crossing it.

But even this did not dishearten the trailers, or cause them to doubt that they could follow him to his lair.

It was clear now that he was seeking refuge in the tangled rock wilderness of the Bad Lands.

And that indicated that "Bill Fisher's friends" were in there, and he meant to join them.

It quickened the heartbeats of the scout and those with him, to reflect that they were probably nearing the place where Pawnee Bill was held as a prisoner—if he still lived.

That last thought filled their minds with the sad possibility—that he might be dead; but they put it from them. Yet now and then in their talk it cropped out.

Buffalo Bill divided his force, to cover the surrounding region more completely and speedily.

"Rocky ground can't last ferever," said Nomad, to the baron, who was his companion; "so, t'other side o' et, ye're bound to find soil er sand. Et's a workin' princerple thet ain't never failed me in all ther y'ars I has been along ther border."

Nomad had left his horse, Hide-rack, and the baron had left his mule, Toofer, in a deep gully, safely hidden from sight of any one passing near them.

"I haf nodd der nose oof a hoondting dog," the baron confessed, "unt I haf nodd got der shapes."

"Ye'd have a better figger, baron, if ye didn't swaller so much bad beer."

"No peer iss badt. Some iss better as der odders; dot iss all der difference. Idt iss der alkali vasser vot make me svell oop like I am some balloons. Yah, dot iss idt. Vot you seen, heh?"

"Jest a b'ar track; but fust off I thought et war human."

The baron glanced round.

"I am hobing he aindt seen me. No; vot I mean iss, I am hobing dot ve tond't seen him. Which vay dit he vendted?"

"Off thar. I reckon you'd better look out for him; as he might take ye fer a bologna sausage."

They did not see the bear; but as they went on they again saw hoofmarks in the sand beyond.

But these they lost again.

For an hour or more they wandered about, not able again to pick them up.

From the tops of hills and sandstone buttes they surveyed the landscape o'er. Yet all their efforts were fruitless.

As the day was now passing, they returned slowly by the route they had come, Nomad's keen eyes still seeking "sign."

When they reached the rendezvous, Buffalo Bill and Little Cayuse had not come in.

Then, as they rode up to it, having again got their mounts, their eyes fell on a thing which brought a bellow from Nomad that was like the roar of an angry bull.

Pinned with a nail against a tree was another human ear, and below it a paper was tacked.

"Waugh!" the old trapper yelped, leaping down from Hide-rack. "Looky hyar, baron, will yer."

The baron's eyes were popping.

"I am looking," he said, stiffening in his saddle.

Nomad squinted at the writing on the tree.

"Another'n," he bellowed; "another letter, what says that this is the second year of Pawnee Bill, and thet one o' his fingers will be comin' next. Waugh!"

The baron glanced round in a scared way.

"Who did idt?" he squealed.

"Ask easy ones," Nomad snarled. "I didn't see 'em."

But he began to glance the ground over.

"All rock," he grumbled, "what wouldn't leave the hoofmarks of a eliphunt."

"Better ve leave dose opjects dill Puffalo Bill he seen idt," said the baron. "I am thinking so. Budt, yiminy Ghristmas, der gall of idt! He iss came here while ve ar-re honndting vor him, unt done idt ag'in. Budt oof——"

"If what?"

"Off der fairst vos nodd pelong to Pawnee Bill, der second likewise idt vos a fake."

"That year ain't no fake."

"Ach! Himmel. No. Idt vos truly."

"Ther thing we ort ter done, an' was fools fer not, is thet we ort ter camped down hyar in hidin'; and then we c'd er seen ther devil what done et, and captered him."

"Der pehint-sighdtness oof your visdom iss no goot now, Nomat. Ve ditn't."

"An' idjits we air thet we didn't."

He held up his hand.

"Lissen. Some un's comin'."

"Der scout unt Liddle Cayuse."

Buffalo Bill came in sight in a moment, clattering over the rocks.

Nomad yelped like a trapped wolf.

"See hyar," he roared; "how many dead men they've got to cut years from I dunno; but hyar's ther second one, tagged up on this tree while we war sloshin' round lookin' fer thet pizen critter's trail."

Buffalo Bill galloped up and inspected this second gruesome find.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEAR THAT WALKED ON ITS HIND LEGS.

Tearing a page from his notebook, Buffalo Bill wrote some words on it with a pencil, and stuck it up beneath the outlaws' warning:

TAKE NOTICE!

FOR EVERY SINGLE INJURY TO PAWNEE BILL I SHALL EXACT TWOFOLD VENGEANCE. THIS IS FAIR WARNING.
BUFFALO BILL.

"What does yer make o' thet year?" Nomad demanded.

"It's the mate of the other one, and cut from the head of a dead man."

"Not Major Lillie's?"

"Certainly not."

"But them scalawags has got him."

"As we're not sure of it, I'm hoping not. Yet," he added, "it certainly looks bad; he has sent us no word, and we got the first of these things soon after he ventured into the boomer camp."

Then he asked Nomad what he and the baron had accomplished.

"Nuthin'," Nomad admitted.

"The Piute will be here in a little while," said the scout; "then I am going to send him out with you and the baron, while I scout off toward the Indian encampment."

"Of course, ye ain't thinkin' thet these hyar skunks we been follerin' is mebbysy truly Injuns, an' has made a step sideways and gone thar?"

"It is too plain that we have been following white men."

Little Cayuse came in sight at a jog trot, and soon joined them. At the ear pinned to the tree he looked dubiously. Then he glanced at the scout.

"That's just another effort to scare us," the scout told him. "I want you to go now with Nomad and the baron. See if you can't pick up this man's trail right here, and then hang to it."

"K'rect. Little Cayuse, hyar's work fer ye. Them Injun eyes o' your'n air plum younger'n mine. Ther man what left his visitin' kyard on this tree didn't fly down hyar, an' he didn't fly none in gittin' away. So hyar's fer trackin' him."

With a few exceptions, there was nothing that old Nomad liked so well as trailing, whether he followed man or beast. That was because his skill was so unquestioned. He had learned of the Indians, and at his own game he could beat an Indian to a frazzle. Still, he had a high conception of the ability of Little Cayuse, and was always pleased to have the young Piute's assistance.

Though the day was drawing toward a close, he returned to the work, with Little Cayuse and the baron.

The baron was "no hoondting dog," as he often averred; but he had a knack of tumbling into results sometimes that seemed strange, and made him invaluable.

Taking up the trail where they had last seen it, they circled the hill again, then went on some distance in a manner that was going it blind.

Then the baron came to bear tracks, like those already noticed.

Schnitzenhauser had no love for bears. He had once

been mauled by a grizzly, and he preferred to give old bruin a wide berth.

But as he stood looking at these tracks he noted a peculiar thing.

"Py shinks," he muttered, "dhis pear he valks only his hindt feedt upon. Dot iss kveer."

He went on, inspecting the tracks, his hand on his revolver, ready for action if he came suddenly face to face with the bear.

"He iss continue dot sinkular pitzness oof valking mit only his hindt feedt. Maype he haf somedimes got himselluf indo a trap, unt hadt his frondt feedt chopped off mit idt. Yaw."

He looked round warily for the bear, whose embraces he didn't intend to fall into if he could help it; then, seeing nothing, he stooped and examined the tracks more critically.

Finally he called to Nomad, who was not distant.

"Yoost you yoomp ofer here unt take me some looks," he advised. "Here iss a bear feedt——"

"Struck a barefooted Inchun trail, heh?" questioned Nomad excitedly.

"I saidt a bear feedt. Iss dot nodt easy to standt-under?"

"Oh, bear tracks!" cried Nomad, as he arrived and squinted down at them. "You had me thet het up——"

"Ar-re you nodicing somet'ings sinkular mit dose tracks? He iss valking py his hindt feedt."

Nomad let his keen old eyes run along, searching each imprint.

"Yer right," he said; "yit of etself thet ain't nowise singular. Ter me ther singular thing, an' I'm kickin' myself fer not seein' et before—fer this is tracks o' thet same b'ar—ter me ther singular thing is thet this hyar b'ar is steppin' pigeontoed."

The baron stared owlishly.

"Vhich der meanness oof der same iss——"

"Ye numbskull, what is et thet walks pigeontoed?"

"Pitcheons."

"And Injuns!"

"Himmelblitzen!"

"Makin' a long-range rope-throw of a guess," said Nomad, "I'm opinin' thet this hyar b'ar what walks on ets hind feet is an Injun, who is w'arin' b'ar's-foot moc-casins fer ther purpose of disguise. I has seen thet trick turned more'n onct by an Injun, an' et's a cute un. Now, ther question is, what is ther logic?"

"Vhy iss he?"

"K'rect. Why is he playin' thet trick."

"To make a foolishness mit somepody, to pe sure."

"K'rect ergin. Baron, yer intellex is improvin' continyool; bimeby ye'll be er wise man, ef ye keeps et up. Who would he want ter be foolin'?"

The baron removed his fore-and-aft cap and deliberately scratched his head.

"Ach! I am hafing idt. Der oudtlaws."

"Go up ahead; you've hit et. And now, ye see, ef we can jest hang to this b'ar-foot trail, we're in ther way o' havin' things made easy fer us; mebbys, anyhow. Fer I'm figgerin' thet this b'ar-footed Injun is knowin' whar them pesky critters air, an' is makin' a sneak ter git clost onter them, fer some purpose. He's playin' b'ar, so's ef they sh'd happen ter see his tracks, they wouldn't be wise ter him."

"I pedt you he iss a schmaridt vun."

"He is."

Nomad stood up and gave a low whistle, which soon brought into view Little Cayuse.

Pointing to the tracks, he said:

"Take er look at them things. They're Injun. And now le's us see ef we're smart enough ter keep 'em from slidin' away right under our eyes."

It was an exciting bit of trailing after that.

They hung to the tracks like a hungry dog to a bone.

Whenever for a few yards they missed them, they circled and beat the ground over, and located them beyond, where there was sand or soft soil.

For more than a mile they kept this up, being greatly aided by the fact that the Indian was not trying hard to conceal his trail, as he felt that even if seen, it would be taken for the thing it so looked to be.

Twilight had fallen when they came in sight of the "bear."

They had trailed the Indian to the top of a windy ridge, where the incessant breeze had gnawed away sand and soil until the rock was as bare as the bleached bones of a skeleton.

There the Indian was stretched out, flat on his stomach, with his head uplifted as he peered over into the hollow beyond. The heavy moccasins whose soles were made of the hind feet of a bear protruded so that the trailers behind him saw them clearly.

Nomad and Little Cayuse sank silently to the ground as soon as they saw him.

"Down!" Nomad whispered to the baron.

He came down with a rumble that caused the Indian to start and look round. But when he saw nothing, he probably thought the sound had been made by a rubbing tree bough, and again looked over into the hollow.

The twilight deepened quickly, so that in a short time the form of the redskin was but a black blur on top of the crest of the ridge.

Nomad began to crawl toward him, after whispering to Little Cayuse:

"I know now who thet red is—he's ther Sioux chief what they calls Pine Knot, ther one thet Buffler saved

from bein' rid down by Bill Fisher. You recklect thet? Waal, hyar goes ter find out what he's bent on."

But apparently the keen ears of the chief heard Nomad's quiet advance; for when, in the thickening gloom, the borderman reached the spot where the chief had been seen, it was deserted.

Nomad looked round, breathing heavily from his tire-some and slow climb.

"Waugh!" he grunted. "Ther red war too slick fer me. I wonder whar he went!"

But the swiftly deepening darkness gave him no answer.

When sure that the redskin had made good his slippery escape, Nomad uttered a low whistling note which had a booming undertone like that made by the wings of the nighthawk.

In response, Little Cayuse and the baron made their appearance.

"He got erway," said Nomad; "I reckon I'm gittin' old an' keerless. But I want yer to looky thar."

Down in the hollow gleamed a far-distant light.

"What does yer make o' thet?"

"Camp fire," whispered Little Cayuse, thrilled by the sight.

"Der oudtlaws iss pefore us," the baron gurgled, in excitement.

"Mebbeso; one of 'em is, anyhow, is my guess. You jest watch et."

The camp fire winked out.

"Now, jest watch et."

It winked into existence again.

"Et's done thet half a dozen times," said Nomad; "winkin' in an' winkin' out, jest like the lantern in a light-house. Some one down thar is signalin' to some one somewhar else."

"Ach! Idt iss so," the baron breathed; "now idt iss doing idt some more dimes ag'in."

"Jest so. I dunno whar thet redskin slipped off to, an' thar ain't no use huntin' fer him when the night is as thick as this un is goin' ter be. So I'm rekwestin' you two ter lay still hyar an' keep a watch on thet light, while I goes down thar an' investergates."

Nomad was gone an hour.

When he came back he was disgusted.

"Ther light went out, didn't et?" he demanded.

"Yaw," the baron admitted.

"And so I couldn't find et; couldn't find nothin' but darkness, an' then some blackness, an' then some more. Et war wuss'n tryin' ter find er dozen black cats at midnight."

He lay looking into the hollow, puzzling as to his course of action.

"I reckon," he said finally, "thet we'd better back track an' give this news ter Buffler. One o' Bill Fisher's men war signalin'. An' ther redskin had him spotted, er had

their camp spotted; mebbysso both. Waugh! Hyar we goes back ter Buffler."

He began to slide down the hill.

CHAPTER XII.

SIoux GRANDILOQUENCE.

At early daybreak Pine Knot, the Sioux chief, shuffled up to the tree where the outlaw messenger had left his gruesome token and his letter, and to which later Buffalo Bill had affixed his defiant note in answer.

Buffalo Bill was standing by the tree, and had seen the redskin even before the latter came out into the open. Likewise, the scout was prepared, in case Pine Knot showed a treacherous disposition.

Nomad, the Piute, and the baron had not arrived, their delay having been caused by the darkness that had stopped their efforts at progress.

As for Buffalo Bill himself, he had spent the night not far from the tree, but in hiding, so that he could spot the outlaw messenger if he came again.

But the night had passed without noteworthy incident.

"How!" said Pine Knot, as he came up to the scout.

He had discarded his "bear-foot" moccasins for those of ordinary make.

"How!" the scout responded, in tones that indicated friendliness.

Extending his salutation, he couched it in Sioux, and assured Pine Knot that he was very welcome.

"The white scout is glad to behold his red brother," he declared. "If Pine Knot has words of wisdom for his ears, let him speak, and they will be heard."

A smile of appreciation spread over the face of the chief. This was meeting him on his own ground, and he liked it. Also, it called for something more formal than he had intended. An Indian is always ready for a gabfest, and if he can fringe it with ceremonial importance, so much the better.

Giving his blanket a flirt, Pine Knot produced his long-stemmed pipe.

"The great Pa-e-has-ka is kind," he said. "Pine Knot would talk with him."

Thereupon, he squatted down in Indian fashion, a swing of his brown hand indicating that he desired the scout to do the same.

Buffalo Bill accepted the invitation.

Digging out his tobacco pouch, a wonderful thing of deerskin and dyed porcupine quills, Pine Knot took out tobacco, and began to crumble it in his palms.

The scout sat watching him in imperturbable silence.

Old Pine Knot had matches—they had come into common use among the Indians; but a grave talk could not be begun by lighting a peace pipe with the white man's fire bringers; that would have approached sacrilege.

So he dug out his old-time flint and steel, with a bit of punky wood that was as dry as powder and almost as inflammable. He crumbled the punk, then began to strike into it sparks from the flint, hacking it with the steel until a shower of sparks seemed to run down into the wood dust.

The punk smoked, then glowed; and, putting his lips to it, with his hands cupped to guard the burning dust, Pine Knot coaxed the feeble fire with his breath.

The smoky glow became a leaping flame; to which he added bits of flax string, and puffed and blew again with his lips.

Soon the flax was flaming, and with this strip of burning flax he lighted the tobacco he had thumbed into the bowl of his tasseled and ornamented pipe.

After sucking at the pipe until it was going well, he solemnly blew smoke rings to the four points of the compass.

Then, with a solemn clucking grunt, he handed the pipe to the scout.

Buffalo Bill would have preferred another pipe, but he made no sign; and, after a pull, which he exhaled slowly and with apparently deep enjoyment, he passed back the pipe.

Three times this was done; after which the noble redskin was ready to talk.

"The great scout is the friend of Pine Knot," he said. "When the evil white man came at him to ride him down, Pa-e-has-ka's rope sprang at the white man's throat with the speed of a spirit serpent, and the white man fell from his horse."

He clucked solemnly over that pleasant memory.

"Pa-e-has-ka is a friend of the Sioux?"

"The Sioux are a noble race," said the scout; "all other Indians are but squaws beside them."

"The white men are kings of the earth, and Pa-e-has-ka is the king of white men."

It was a duel of compliments, and according to the highest forms of Indian etiquette; they fairly larded each other with terms of honor.

"But as there are snakes that hide in the sweetest grass," said Pine Knot, "so among the best of men are those who seek evil."

"My red brother speaks only the truth," Buffalo Bill gravely admitted.

"And as there are harmless serpents that resemble poisonous ones, so there are poisonous ones that at times makes themselves resemble the harmless ones," was the chief's cryptic utterance.

"It is very true, my brother," Buffalo Bill agreed.

"Has my brother seen the poisonous snakes that have taken on the likeness of those who are not?" asked Pine Knot.

"Pa-e-has-ka is seeking them, but he has not found them."

"Pine Knot with his own eyes has seen them."

"My brother's eyes are like the eyes of the eagle when he is skimming the skies of blue," said the scout.

Pine Knot approved with a guttural gurgle.

Then he flitted a glance at the blackened ear nailed to the tree near him. Up to this time, though he had seen it at the first glance, he had given no indication of the fact.

"The ear that hears no longer—whence has it come?" he asked.

"The poisonous rattlesnakes that pretend to be harmless sent it with the speaking leaf that is now beside it; they claimed they had bitten it from the head of the great scout known among white men as Pawnee Bill, but that is a lie. If my brother will look, he can see that it was cut from the head of a dead man?"

"Ugh!" grunted Pine Knot, staring at the ear.

"My brother," said the scout, "has seen the poisonous rattlesnakes in their burrow?"

"Pine Knot has seen them," said the chief gravely.

"My brother can tell me, then, if they have as a prisoner the great white scout called Pawnee Bill."

This was mixing metaphors in a manner to set a grammarian crazy, but that fact did not trouble the Indian chief.

"They have a white prisoner."

"You have seen him?"

The chief inclined his feathered head with a grave motion.

"What else did the eagle eyes of my friend, Pine Knot, behold?"

"The white prisoner was bound in their midst."

"Is the burrow of the snakes far from here?" the scout asked.

"It is so near that Pine Knot, when he beheld his white brother here by the tree, was on his way to bring his braves, that the snakes might be stamped by them into the earth."

"You will lead your braves against them?"

Again the chief inclined his head.

"We will stamp them with our moccasin heels so that even their burrow cannot be seen later," he declared, with a sudden fiery flash of his black eyes.

Buffalo Bill had no great desire to protect the villainous white men from the vengeance of the Sioux. They had marked themselves as Indians and committed crimes which they hoped would be laid at the door of the Indians. They had stirred up trouble along the reservation border. They had done everything they could to irritate the Sioux and drive them into a rebellion against the agency authorities, so that an excuse might be found for removing the Indians to some other section and giving this rich soil over to the hungry hordes of Western land-seekers.

Still, the scout did not want that attack made; and it was mainly for the reason that it would inevitably endanger the life of Pawnee Bill.

So he, while seeming to digest the statements of the chief, was casting about for means to prevent the attack.

"It will not be wise for my brother to do that," he said at last. "My brother knows the evil spirit that is in the white men who are crowding the borders of the Sweet-water Reservation. Even though these burrowing white men are snakes, not all white men know it, or could be made to believe it; and when the braves of my red brother trample them into the earth, the news of it will fly on the wings of the wind to the camp of the white men my brother has no doubt seen; and there trouble will be bred, and out of it will come a whirlwind storm of black gunpowder which may scorch and wither my red brother and his brave warriors. Is it not well to think of these things?"

The chief scowled; he did not like this so well as he had liked the scout's honeyed words of flattery.

"Then my brother would protect the snakes that crawl in the night and bite the heels of his friends, the Sioux?"

"No; but I would have my red brother delay this. Will he not delay it until to-morrow? In the meantime, Pa-e-has-ka will creep to the point which Pine Knot will indicate, and look into the burrow of the snakes. After that he will have another smoke talk with him, before my red brother strikes."

The chief frowned again.

"Why does Pa-e-has-ka ask that?"

"I will speak to my red brother with a straight tongue. He has seen the white man held by those burrowing snakes. That white man is the great scout, Pawnee Bill. If my red brother strikes now, while he is held there, as he grinds the snakes into the earth, my white brother will be ground into the earth with them."

"Ugh!" the chief grunted reflectively.

"So I ask my red brother to delay. Then I will crawl to the place where he shall point out to me the burrow. And Pa-e-has-ka will try to get his white brother out of the burrow before it is trodden down by the braves of Pine Knot."

"Ugh!"

The black eyes fixed on the face of the scout glowed thoughtfully.

"As proof that I am the friend and well-wisher of Pine Knot, I speak again of the leader of those snakes, the white man who tried to ride my red brother down. I caught him from his saddle, and, tying him, I took him away. It may please my red brother to reflect that he is now in the white man's jail, and cannot get out."

"Pine Knot thanks Pa-e-has-ka."

"And he will do what Pa-e-has-ka wishes?"

The chief still considered.

"It is well," he grunted; "Pine Knot will do as he wishes. He will go his way now, trusting his white brother, the great Pa-e-has-ka. But when the sun walks the sky again, then he and his braves will strike. If Pa-e-has-ka would save his white brother let him move quickly."

He got up gravely, hid the pipe in his blanket, which he draped about his shoulders as only an Indian can drape a blanket, then with solemn tread he stalked away and disappeared amid the rocks.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

The Sioux chief had departed without telling the scout where the rascally outlaw leaders of the land boomers had their hiding place in the hills. But he had seen that Pine Knot was not then ready to impart this, and he knew, understanding the Indian character so well, that it was best not to press him.

Besides, having knowledge of the location of the Indian encampment in the Bad Lands, he was sure that by going there he could at any time locate Pine Knot, if he so desired.

Hardly was the Indian chief out of sight when Nomad broke cover in the opposite direction, and came up at a fast walk, followed by the baron and Little Cayuse.

Nomad's homely, bearded face showed unusual animation; so, before he reached the tree, Buffalo Bill knew the old borderman had news he considered important.

"More year messages?" Nomad asked, glancing at the tree.

"Nothing more," said the scout. "I have been having a talk with old Pine Knot. And since then I have been waiting here for you."

"I pine not ter see him," Nomad cackled; "fer he is a crazy red."

"Perhaps you have done as well as he has—I hope so. He has located 'Bill Fisher's friends.'"

"Waal, we located *him*—after trailin' his b'ar-foot moccasins; an' then we seen a light down in ther holler beyond ther hill, which et war winkin' messages; so we cal'late, while we didn't edzackly locate them catermounts, we grazed clost erround."

"Pine Knot calls them snakes."

"Catermounts er snakes, et's all ther same; they're a pizen lot."

"Old Pine Knot intends to strike their camp to-morrow with his warriors. He meant to turn the trick to-day, but as I feared for the life of Pawnee Bill, I got him to postpone it until to-morrow."

"Er-waugh! Then Pawnee is thar?"

"They are holding a white prisoner, the chief told me."

"So-o dot makes idt sure he iss nodd deadt yedt already," said the baron. "I am hobing so."

"I have felt sure of that from the first."

"I haf nit. Dose willains vouldt do anyt'ings."

"Waal, they didn't. fool us with them thar jackass years they sent," said Nomad. "So what's yer plan, Buffler?"

"You followed Pine Knot?"

"Ve dit; unt he was a bear's foodt."

"Thet is, he war w'arin' b'ar's-foot moccasins; so thet he made a track like a b'ar walkin' on et's hind laigs. We tracked him ter ther top of a rise, jest afore dark; and thar he lay, with them curious footgear stickin' out behint him, and his head peeked over, lookin' inter ther holler beyond."

"I tried ter make a sneak onter him, but I reckon he heard me; anyway, he made a slide, and got erway. Et was growin' so dark I couldn't see scurcely."

"Und dhen ve seen der lighdts vot make der vinks go roundt."

"Thar war a little light shinin' off down in ther holler," Nomad amended, "and some critter down thar war signalin' with et. I allow he held a blanket afore et a while, then jerked et away an' let ther light shine out. How many times he done et I dunno. But I went down in search of him, and found jest nothin'. Ther dark war so thick ye could er cut et with a huntin' knife."

"Then we back tracked, ter tell ye erbout et; and got lost in thet thick blackness, an' jest had ter camp out till ther daylight come."

"Unt now ve ar-re here ag'in."

"If you can strike that place again, it seems to me we ought to find the ashes of that fire, and the trail of one man at least leading away from it, if he isn't there still. If he signaled the other men, he probably joined them; and we can find them by stickin' to his trail."

"Et's work thet suits me," said Nomad; "an' on account o' Pawnee Bill I'm thet anxious ter bergin et thet et plum takes away my healthy appertite."

Nevertheless, Nomad was able to do full justice to the good breakfast which Buffalo Bill insisted should be prepared before they tackled work that might fill up a very strenuous day.

When they had eaten, the remains of the meal were cleared away. After that the party went into hiding amid the rocks, for rest was needed by every one, and it was thought desirable to keep watch for a time on the tree. Another messenger might come, to see at least if anything had been left as an answer, and if he came they wanted to see him.

They remained in hiding four hours. That gave three hours of sleep and an hour of watching for each member of the party.

Then they struck off into the hills again, Nomad and Little Cayuse leading the way.

Finding the "bear tracks" once more, these were followed until some time in the afternoon, when they sighted the high, wind-swept ridge where Pine Knot had been seen the day before.

"Thar she is," said Nomad. "Beyond et ther light war doin' et's highland fling. I reckon thar ain't nobody thar now, though."

From the ridge they looked into the distant hollow, which seemed deserted.

But to make sure of that the scout crept down the opposite side of the ridge, and so on into the valley.

He found the ashes of a little fire, and footprints leading off from it.

Standing on top of a rock, he swung his Stetson to let the others know they were to join him.

He was still standing on the rock, hat in hand, while the others approached, when a rifle cracked, and the wind of the bullet fanned his bronzed cheek in its passage.

The scout went off the rock like a frog diving into a millpond. And his companions dropped flat in the grass.

Ker-whang-ng!

The rifle sped a second bullet, which glanced from the top of the rock.

On a hillside, in a clump of bushes, crouched the rifleman, as was shown by the drift of blue smoke above it.

From his place behind the rock the scout replied spiritedly with his rifle.

"Yer got him, I'm hopin'," Nomad snorted from his bed in the grass.

Anyway, a great silence came upon the hills.

But five minutes later a man popped into view, more than a long rifle shot distant, and ran with goatlike jumps for safety.

Buffalo Bill hurried him with another bullet, which spouted a shower of sand in his wake.

"The same fellow, I reckon," he said.

"He's one er them, I guess."

"Probably," said the scout, "the man who was doing the signaling last night. The way he tore along, he left a trail that a blind man could follow, and we'll pick it up soon."

But they did not need to go hunting for the "Friends of Bill Fisher," as before long the latter came hunting for them.

While still no men were seen, a dropping fire of rifle bullets came down on the little group gathered by the rock, driving them once more into the grass.

"Er-waugh!" roared Nomad, swinging over and sending a return shot. "Take thet, wi' my complerments, will ye!"

Nomad's "compliments" seemed to have been of a knockout quality, for the firing of the hidden riflemen slackened, and soon ceased.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PUZZLER.

Just as night came down, shrouding the hills from which the rifle fire had come, a burning arrow flamed into the air there, and with a swift and beautiful curve, which made it a streak of living light against the darkness of the sky, it descended with a hiss into the nest of rocks where Buffalo Bill's little party still crouched.

Sticking in the ground at a sharp angle, it flamed like a torch, lighting up the rocks and the faces of the concealed men.

"Look out," Nomad warned; "et's shinin' us up purty cl'ar, an' bullets is likely ter come chasin' in hyar after et."

But the expected bullets not coming, Buffalo Bill crept out, extinguished the blazing stuff near its tip, and brought it back with him safely.

"Another message, I think," he said.

"Proberbly bringin' a finger wi' et this time," Nomad guessed.

There was a crumpled sheet of paper tied round the shaft close to the arrow head, the cord used being sinew, after the Indian fashion.

Cutting the sinew with his knife, the scout smoothed out the paper, then struck a match to read it by.

All crowded close round him, under shelter of the rock, and stared at the message.

As soon as he saw it, Buffalo Bill blew out a whistle of surprise; then, holding the match light close, he began to read:

"This is our third warning. If it is not heeded, and you are still there when daylight comes, we shall charge you and kill every member of your party. But before we do it we shall first kill Pawnee Bill. Don't make the mistake of thinking this is a joke, for we mean it. You have trailed us to this point; but what good will it do you, as you have now put yourselves in our power? But as we do not want to get into further trouble with Uncle Sam, and so do not want to have to kill you, we ask you to get out—and get out quick. This is a fair warning, and it is our last. BILL FISHER'S FRIENDS."

The scout still held the flaming match for all to see the message.

Then he extinguished it in his hand.

"No years er fingers this time," said Nomad; "jest plain threatenin'. But I has lived too many y'ars ter be skeered by owls hootin' in ther dark."

"Aber I am skeered, idt iss now too late, heh?" said the baron. "Vale, oof I am kilt, I am deadt, ain't I, unt I tond't knowed idt; so idt wouldn't hurt me!"

He began to suck at the long stem of his pipe, as if he had thus dismissed the matter.

"Didn't you notice anything about that message?" asked the scout.

"Et seemed perticklerly well worded, ter come from thet nest o' ignerant thieves."

"You didn't note anything else?"

"Not bein' thet edjicated myself thet et's hurtin' me, I cain't say, Buffler, thet I did," Nomad confessed.

"Well, the surprising thing about this message is that it was written by Pawnee Bill."

It brought Nomad up from his crouching position with a whoop of amazement.

"Say thet erg'in, Buffler," he begged, "fer I reckon I shore didn't ketch et right."

"The message was written by Pawnee Bill."

"So-o?" said the baron, still sucking at his pipe.

"There is no doubt about it. I know his handwriting as well as I do my own."

"Waal, ef thet——"

Nomad floundered, gasping.

"Yes, it's a puzzle," Buffalo Bill admitted.

"Et plum flabbergasts me, Buffler."

"Yaw, me, too. I am dot twisted I tond't know oof I am meinselluf or somepody else. Aber he dit it, vot iss der meanness oof vlich, unt der——"

"Aw, come off ther dump," Nomad begged. "Let Buffler figger this hyar out; et will take a head thet's some fit fer tall figgerin', I reckon."

Buffalo Bill pondered, and shook his head.

"Oof he dit idt," said the baron, "idt iss easiness enough."

"Then you tell," said Nomad.

"Vhy, dhey made him do idt. Oof gourse. Oddervise he vouldt nit. Dot iss so easy."

Buffalo Bill brought up another match, and scratched it. Then, by its light, with his friends looking over his shoulder, he went over the message again carefully.

Not discovering anything to reward this search, but being confirmed by it in his certainty that the handwriting was Pawnee Bill's, he ran the hot blaze of the match under the paper, so that in places it was scorched brown.

"Sometimes," he said, "hidden writing can be brought out by heat; but there seems to be nothing of the kind here. I hardly thought there would be. It would seem to prove that there is no mystery about it, after all. And that the baron's guess goes straight to the truth. Pawnee Bill wrote it, and they forced him to write it."

Yet that hardly accorded with the great scout's idea of Pawnee Bill's character. It was not easy to force Major Gordon W. Lillie to do a thing he did not want to do.

"If that is not the solution, then I give it up."

"Waal, what we goin' ter do?" Nomad questioned.

"For one thing, Nomad, we will not back track."

"Et's a fact thet you gin'rally don't, Buffler."

"Another thing is, I think I shall try a little investigating."

"Go inter thet camp, ye mean?"

"Into it, or as near to it as I can get. I was thinking of that before this message came; and now I seem to be driven to it. Pawnee Bill is there—this handwriting shows that; and we have thought of him as a prisoner. But——"

"Oddervise," said the baron, "dhey couldt nodd make him write idt. Dhey haf yoost pudt a bistol py his headt alongsite. Undher der circumsdances—vale, I vouldt done him meinselluf. Dare iss no mysdery apoudt dot."

"Stay here," said the scout, "until you hear from me. I may be gone till morning, though I hope to get back inside of an hour. If I am captured you will hear some sort of ruction, I assure you. But don't try to rush in on that account, as they far outnumber us. After daylight, if I have not returned, you can use your own judgment."

"Idt iss going to pe a long vhiles to wait vor some liddle excidement," the baron grumbled.

But Buffalo Bill moved off through the darkness and was speedily lost to view.

"Idt iss so mooch oof a blainness dot idt tond't drouple me," said the baron; "dhey made him do idt."

He put a match to his pipe, cuddled against the rock, and began to smoke again.

"Mebbeso um spirits—mebbeso um whiskizos," suggested Little Cayuse, whose black eyes had been staring into the darkness, and his keen ears drinking everything in, though he had made no comment until now.

Nomad gave a jump.

"Stop et," he grumbled; "ef yer says whiskizos erg'in, er opens yer mouth ter, I'll set my heel in et."

It was a big heel, and the Piute subsided. But the suggestion made Nomad stare round into the night and gave him as many shivery thrills as were already chasing up and down the spine of the superstitious Piute. For Nomad, superstitious as an Indian, shaped his fears of whiskizos in much the same way that the Piute shaped his fears of spirits.

When an hour had passed and brought no Buffalo Bill, they concluded to take turns at watching, so that all could get some sleep.

Out in the hills into which the daring scout had penetrated, silence lay as deep as the darkness.

CHAPTER XV.

PAWNEE BILL'S TRICK.

When the moon came out, an hour or so after midnight, its light fell on the crouching form of Buffalo Bill, and on a number of shadowy figures distant from him not more than a rod.

He had made so successful a crawl that he had actually located the desperado camp, and was now that close to it. He was studying out his next course of action, when he saw a figure step out from a face of rock, where shadows had concealed it, and walk into the moonlight.

The scout could hardly conceal the start of surprise which that gave him. For the man he beheld now with reasonable clearness was Pawnee Bill, or else some one who was disguised as Pawnee Bill had been on quitting the agency. It was not, therefore, the familiar Pawnee Bill so well known to the scout, but the transformed Pawnee Bill who had ridden forth to join "Bill Fisher's friends," for the purpose of undoing them.

The man carried a rifle, a glinting of moonlight revealing its barrel. For a moment or so he stood looking off in the direction of the hollow which held Buffalo Bill's party. Standing thus facing the scout, even his darkened face, pulled-down, dyed mustache, and the farmerlike hat and clothing he wore, were clearly visible.

Buffalo Bill was almost on the point of giving a low hiss to attract his attention, but was restrained by his customary caution.

Having turned about, the man walked slowly toward the nearest of the dark figures stretched on the ground.

By this figure he stooped, and the scout saw the curling toss of a lariat.

Slowly and as silently as the shadow that trailed after him the man went from figure to figure. There were ten of them, according to the scout's rather uncertain count. One of them, after the man had bent over him, as if tying him, rose and followed.

Returning toward the dead fire in the center of the little camp, the man so resembling Pawnee Bill as the scout had last beheld him, seemed to be speaking to the man who had followed him. They stood with heads together. Then the scout beheld a flash, as if from a knife blade or the metal of a revolver.

Stooping again, the man seemed placing articles on the ground; and there, under his moving fingers, grew a shiny heap, glittering like weapons in the uncertain light of the moon.

If the scout had been, like Nomad, a believer in whizzos, he would have thought himself bewitched. But, though his eyes had been telling him amazing things, he did not doubt their reliability, so far as their powers went, nor his own sanity.

Finally the man rose, and, turning sharply away from the camp, came straight toward Buffalo Bill. It was as if he had seen the scout, though this seemed very unlikely.

"Well, I'll know who he is, and what all that hocus-pocus means, within a minute, now," Buffalo Bill whispered.

He pulled himself together for a struggle, it being his

intention to leap on the man softly and bear him quietly to the ground.

But it was an intention not carried out. For as the man came on, clearly unaware that the scout lay there, he lifted his head again, as though listening; and the moonlight, striking under the brim of his hat, fell squarely in his face.

It was not the familiar face of Pawnee Bill, but it was the face shown by Pawnee Bill when he rode off from the agency, and the hat and clothing were the same.

"Lillie," the scout now whispered, at the same time holding himself ready for a leap, if his eyes were fooling him.

The man stopped, as if rooted, and looked around, while a hand dropped to his belt. The next instant, as it lifted, the scout saw the flashing of the bright blade of one of the well-known and deadly knives.

"Lillie, is it you?"

"Who speaks?" came the whispered answer, as the man stared round, gripping the knife haft.

"Cody!"

The man looked about, then straight before him. The formless shadow he beheld took shape.

"In the name of——" He stopped, still staring while the hand holding the knife lifted. "Is that you, Cody?"

"The same."

Buffalo began to rise.

The threatening knife hand sank at the man's side.

"Cody?"

"The same. And you are Pawnee Bill."

"Right, necarnis," came in the familiar tones. "But this——"

"Yes, it puzzles me."

Silently they crossed the yard intervening, and as silently they clasped hands.

"An explanation is in order, necarnis. I thought you were off yonder, and I intended to try to get in communication with you."

"A dozen explanations are in order, on your side."

Pawnee Bill laughed silently.

"Less than that number will answer, I think. Did you get that last arrow message?"

"That is why I am here; we couldn't understand it, and I had to investigate."

"I'm glad of that. Perhaps I couldn't have found you in the dark; and this is better."

"You weren't a prisoner?"

"Not on your life, necarnis."

"Then we were fooled."

"Others, likewise."

"You will certainly have to explain, Pard Lillie."

"This will be better. Come." He turned about. "I can't tell you how lucky it was that I met you."

"And didn't throw that knife into me!"

"Ah, you saw it. But—come."

They had spoken in whispers. Now Pawnee Bill crept back toward the camp, followed by the puzzled scout. Seldom had Buffalo Bill been so mystified.

As they drew near the dead camp fire, the man who had been standing by the glittering pile which appeared to be a heap of weapons, turned, with a flashing look, and swung up a revolver.

"It's all right," Pawnee Bill whispered. "Save your bullets until they're needed."

One of the shadowy forms beyond, stirred by the words, rolled over; then groaned, and tried suddenly to sit up. The effort flung him along with a sidewise motion, and a howl came from his lips.

Pawnee Bill sprang for the shining heap at the feet of the man who had lifted the revolver. When he came up he had a cocked revolver in each hand.

"Weapons there, Cody," he said, "if you're short."

He made another dive, and caught out of the apparently dead camp fire a smoldering brand. Swinging it round his head, he brought it to a blaze.

Exclamations were sounding all along the line of shadowy figures. And the shadowy figures were moving and rolling. Out of their midst came, too, angry oaths and oburgations.

The flashing flame of the firebrand Pawnee Bill flung over them.

Every one of the men was bound hand and foot.

The astounded scout turned to look at the man who stood close by him. At the same moment the fellow cackled a laugh.

"Bumptious Basil, at yer service."

"And a hero," said Pawnee Bill, "if ever there was one."

A dim understanding rushed through the bewildered mind of Buffalo Bill. He saw that Pawnee Bill had tied up the desperadoes, so that each was helpless; and it was plain that he had done the trick while they slept, and had at the same time deprived them of their weapons. That shining heap represented their knives and revolvers.

But how had it been done? He remembered that Pawnee Bill had said he had not been a prisoner.

Rolling and struggling, the men who had been so cleverly captured and tied filled the air with wild threats, howls, and profanity.

Pawnee Bill swung the brand, throwing its light over them; while Bumptious Basil threatened them with a pair of revolvers.

"Jest take it easy—easy," Bumptious Basil urged; "tain't no sort o' use fer ye to howl now, sense you're that hogtied I reckon it's plum hard work fer ye to

breathe without chokin'. Jest ca'm down and take it easy."

Pawnee Bill lifted a revolver and sent three shots into the air.

"To call old Nomad and the rest of the crew," he explained; "they ought not to miss this."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

A tumbling rush of feet was heard after a short time, and Nomad's wolf howl broke on the night.

"Comin', Buffer," he yelled through the darkness; "jest hold ther fort till we git thar!"

In another minute he yelped again from the top of the ridge where Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill had met.

"Whar erway?" he called. "Jest yip ther word, an' we're right with ye."

"Right down here," said Buffalo Bill. "But no shooting is needed. Pawnee Bill is here, and everything is all right."

With quick leaps old Nomad came down, crowded hard for first place by Little Cayuse and the baron.

Pawnee Bill had flung his blazing brand into the dying camp fire, and, stirring up the embers with his foot, had started the fire again. The firelight and the moonlight outlined the scene for the wondering eyes of Nomad and his companions.

The old borderman drew up with a jerk of astonishment, and gulped for words with which to express his bewilderment.

"We have raked the desperado boomers in; that is all," said Pawnee Bill quietly. "The pistol shots were signals for you to join us. I felt that this sight would be good for your old eyes."

Nomad goggled with excited curiosity.

"I'll explain the whole thing," said Pawnee Bill, "as soon as I make sure that the bits of lariat I tied them up with are going to hold. It was a hasty job."

Bumptious Basil gave him eager assistance in this.

When they came back, sure that the prisoners were secure, Pawnee Bill dug a couple of cigars out of his Stetson.

"I haven't dared to use these, or even show them," he said, "until right now. Have one with me, Pard Bill. I know that Nomad and the baron like their pipes better than any Havana that ever came out of—New York City."

A minute later he was telling his story, with verbal helps from Bumptious Basil. But at the same time he kept an eye on his prisoners.

"Well, it was simple," he said, "and dead easy—my part of the little drama. 'Bill Fisher's friends' had me spotted—they thought. You recollect that at the agency they had some spies who had managed to smuggle in with the Indian police. Basil was there, too; he had a fight with one of them, and choked him; we found the fellow insensible, and it was the noise of the fight we heard.

"Basil Trent—that is my new friend's name—had come to the agency for the purpose of letting Pard Cody know just who he was; he thought they might work together, if Cody saw his credentials and understood that in reality he was a secret agent of the Indian department, instead of the scatter-brained ragamuffin he had seemed to be."

Bumptious Basil cackled out his foolish laugh.

"But he changed his mind. He thought there were more spies among the Indian police, and he didn't want them to spot him. So he slid out, but not until he had overheard me telling you what I intended to do. We must have been talking louder than we thought, Pard Cody."

"Depends on how loud ye thought ye was talkin'," said Basil; "anyway, 'twas loud enough."

"When he left, riding hastily, one of the disguised desperadoes who had sneaked in with the Indian police followed him. Though he lost sight of him, when he saw Basil in the boomer camp he recognized him as the man he had tried to follow.

"But Basil and I had met, had exchanged confidences, and come to an understanding. And we both joined Fisher's friends. And right there the fun began—for me."

"But not for me," said Bumptious Basil.

"Fisher's friends made the mistake of thinking the man who had left the agency, and had been followed by one of their number, was my humble self; for that man had also heard enough to inform him of the plan I intended to put into operation.

"So they made the funny mistake of spotting Basil for me. When we had left the boomer camp, he was held up by them, and was charged with being that terrible villain, Pawnee Bill."

Basil cackled again.

"They informed him they intended to hold him, and would kill him, if Cody did not at once release Bill Fisher. Then they began sending messages to Cody."

"With er dead man's year's in 'em," said Nomad.

"Yes; one of their crowd had collided with a bullet, and they ear-cropped him for that purpose."

"As they wasn't likely to send three ears, as havin' been taken from the head o' the same man, I reckoned I was safe on that p'int," Basil commented. "So whenever they showed me an ear and a message, I jest set still an' grinned."

"And there is where the heroism of my friend Basil came in," declared Pawnee Bill. "He, to make me safe, acknowledged that he was Pawnee Bill, and told them to do their worst, and smiled at their threats. And he stuck to it to the last."

"Wasn't it a compliment," said Basil, "fer me to be mistaken fer a man like Pawnee Bill? Was I goin' to put such honors away from me? I betcher not. So I went right on enjoyin' a glory that wa'n't due me, and kept still. I never did like lyin', but that kind——"

He waved his hand with a deprecatory motion.

"This afternoon," Pawnee Bill continued, "one of you fellows sent a rifle bullet that smashed the fingers of Foggy Ike, over there, who had been writing the messages. As they wanted to send another, I volunteered to do the writing, and we flipped it over to you just at dark, tied to a burning arrow."

"So-o," said the baron. "Vhen you know how idt iss, idt iss so simple as easy."

"They had done a lot of hard traveling, winding in and out to keep you from following their tracks. And that, with the fight of this afternoon and its excitement, tuckered them out. They wanted sleep; and I kindly volunteered to stand guard. They consented, as they had never mistrusted me.

"Well," he laughed, "I believe that brings us right down to now. I took advantage of their kindness, and tied them up. At the same time I untied my friend Basil, and took all their weapons."

"Halleluyer!" roared Nomad, too delighted for self-restraint.

"Then, knowing that Cody and the rest of you were over in that hollow, I was setting out to tell you about it, leaving Basil to guard the capture, when—I bumped into Pard Cody, who had been watching me, and was near enough to have shot me.

"And," he laughed again, "I believe that is all. Here are 'Bill Fisher's friends' ready and willing to join their friend and leader in the county jail. Necarnis, I turn them over to you with great joy and thankfulness."

"Halleluyer!" Nomad roared again.

THE END.

Next week you will have a mystery story with a capital M. Buffalo Bill and his pards track the last treacherous renegades of the Rosebud Reservation into the Bad Lands. The Indians, being familiar with the natural wonders of the country, try a score of clever ruses to entrap the scouts and lead them to destruction. But Little Cayuse is with the renegades, playing, for the time, a double rôle, and the final climax is as thrilling and wonderful as the mysteries of the Bad Lands themselves. The title is "Buffalo Bill's Barbecue; or, Pawnee Bill and Bumptious Basil." No. 512. Out next week.



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SAVED BY THE TELEPHONE.

By HENRY CLAYTON.

The term "globe-trotting" seems to suggest a pleasure of the rich, but a return home from the other side of the world as a steerage passenger, short of money, clothes, and friends—weary, heartsick, and despairing—is a very different thing.

The latter was my case, as, one autumn day, I reached New York.

I went to the cheapest lodging house I could find, and from here I wrote to my cousin, James Harden; and glad enough I was when he came and took me away. He was very kind. I turned to him as my only friend, and as we threaded our path through the city's devious streets we concerted ways and means together.

Our uncle, Ben Harden, was a miser of the very deepest dye. He was worth some thousands, yet lived in a miserable garret. That I knew full well, but Jim assured me that he was my sheet anchor of hope; and that if the matter were judiciously managed and I showed my willingness to work, the old gentleman would afford me no mean assistance. To him, then, my first visit must be paid. For my own part, I had my doubts, for there was no disguising the fact that, having trotted round the globe, I had returned a dismal failure.

The lodging which my cousin provided me was situated in a poor place, off the Bowery, but I was glad enough to have it. I felt as though my troubles were at an end. Alas! They were only just beginning.

The next day James Harden came again. He said he had been paying the way for me, and that I must call upon my uncle that evening. We accordingly sallied forth and wandered about for some hours aimlessly—or so it seemed to me. We adjourned to sundry saloons, and I am sorry to say that I became somewhat muddled. My Cousin Jim was one of those people whose practical charity generally takes the form of drink unlimited, and I was one of the weak mortals who just as generally accept the liquid.

He explained to me that, as the old miser was in constant dread of conspiracies on the part of his relatives, we must on no account go to him together. His ways were peculiar,

and I was to get to his lodging not a minute earlier than nine o'clock. Then, having given me elaborate directions for discovering my uncle's abode, James Harden left me somewhat abruptly, alleging that he had an appointment which must be kept. How I spent the intervening hour or two I can hardly remember now. I had another drink or two; then tried to pull myself together a bit, and lounged along, gazing in at the shop windows.

It was a miserable time enough, for rain had been falling all the afternoon. The atmosphere was surcharged with electricity; thunder rumbled ominously at intervals, and vivid flashes of lightning lit up the murky sky. But I had braved the climates of every quarter of the globe, so paid but little heed to the weather.

At length I found myself in the street where Benjamin Harden lived. It was a squalid, poverty-stricken place. Dirty, half-clad children gamboled in the gutter; rough men and draggle-tailed women elbowed their way in and out of the little saloon at the corner. I soon found No. 12. The door was ajar; I pushed it open and proceeded up the dark, rickety staircase. On the topmost landing I paused, and, after groping some minutes in the dark, found at last the door of the front room.

I knocked. There was no reply. A chilling silence seemed suddenly to have fallen upon all things. Then I recollected all at once how deaf my uncle was, and that Jim had advised me to walk in without waiting for an invitation. I accordingly pushed the door open, and, standing upon the threshold, the same cold, deathlike stillness came over me, like a foreboding of coming evil; and in that moment I took in all details of the wretched garret. The window had been taken out, probably for repairs, and I remember thinking what a dreadful place it must be to live in.

Then I gave a start of surprise and horror. On the mantelshelf a small candle end was sputtering down in its socket and by this fitful glimmer I perceived the old man's body lying senseless on the floor. I sank down by his side and called upon him by name. He did not move; the arm which I seized sank back cold and nerveless. He was dead!

And even as I raised my hands I saw, with a sickening thrill, that they were bathed in blood! He had been murdered! Then my glance fell upon the weapon lying on the ground. It was—great heavens!—if was my own bowie knife, which I had brought from abroad. When had I lost it? Who stole it from me? My God! Was I going mad, or was it only a terrible dream? I would have called for help, but my tongue clove to my palate. I was paralyzed, and even as I rose to fly, the word which I would have spoken was caught up in a confused cry without:

"Murder!"

How was it known? I afterward heard that it was through the old man's lifeblood which had dripped through the floor into the room beneath.

I stupidly snatched up the knife, and was about to rush from this horrible place, as though I had been the guilty one. But I was stopped. A crowd was already filling the garret. I was in the hands of two policemen—caught red-handed, as it seemed, vainly protesting my innocence!

How can I pretend to describe my feelings as I lay that night in the cell, waiting and praying anxiously for daylight to appear? Unknown, poor, and friendless as I was, with every possible detail of circumstantial evidence against me, there was no denying that my position was, indeed, a critical one. But when morning broke it brought me no relief, but rather added to the terrors of my situation.

I was taken, in custody, before the coroner's inquest. Here again everything tended to incriminate me more and more. No one had noticed me enter the house or go up the stairs. My own knife was conclusively proven to have done the deed. James Harden, who gave me a nod and sympathetic glance of recognition, delivered his evidence briefly and clearly; but he was unable to throw any fresh

light upon the matter, for it appeared that he had left the house much earlier in the evening.

Having first been cautioned, I elected to make my statement. It was the simple truth; but even as I spoke I could read in the jurors' faces that I had only succeeded in prejudicing my own case, and the sum of horrors which surrounded me was hardly added to when a verdict of willful murder was returned against me, Richard Stedman.

Then I was taken back to my cell, only to be brought up on another day at the police court, when there was a fresh ordeal to be gone through. Here I had to face the magistrate, the lawyers, the reporters—who took critical stock of me—and, worse than all, the gaping, sensation-loving crowd. This examination merely terminated in my being committed for trial some three months distant.

That was all the ordinary course of justice. To me it seemed refined torture. I was falling into a hopeless, miserable state, having made up my mind that I was an utter failure, and that one fate was much the same as another. If they thought me guilty, why not punish me at once, and have done with it?

My cousin James came to see me as often as he could. That was my one comfort. His was the only face I saw from day to day. He found a lawyer who promised to take up my defense. This gentleman consulted with me once or twice, but I could give him little help. The law prefers proving a positive to a negative. If I was innocent, who was guilty? This was the point: Who could have had a motive for encompassing the old man's death?—for nothing appeared to have been stolen. To such questions—through my long absence from home and consequent ignorance of my uncle's circumstances and surroundings—I could offer no possible solution.

And so the days and weeks passed sadly and heavily away.

It now behooves me to write of events which I, being confined in prison, only heard of afterward. It happened one day that Detective Ferrett, who had the case in hand, was prowling about the street where Benjamin Harden had lived and died. This sagacious officer thought it was not so simple an affair as was generally imagined, and, attired in laboring garb, which would attract the least attention in that district, he was quietly pursuing his investigations. Casting his eye reflectively up at that dismantled window—now left just as it had been on the night of the murder—he perceived a man upon a very high ladder just opposite, repairing some telephone wires. Something was radically wrong with the white china insulator. It had to come down, and down came the man with it. An unusual occurrence appeared to be exciting the ladder.

"I say, mate," he cried, addressing Mr. Ferrett, "here's a strange thing! I've heard of this sorter thing once, but never seed it nor believed it. Look here, there's a picture been flashed onto this insulator by the lightning!"

The officer looked, and an irrepressible exclamation of: "Well, I never!" broke from his usual sphinxlike lips. "This has got to go to the police!"

The workman made some demur, but was finally won over—a process in which the production by Ferrett of his authority formed some part. On the insulator was found a vivid and ghastly picture of two men struggling, the one with a knife raised to stab the other. An enlarged photograph was taken by the authorities, and then the features came out with terrible distinctness—the victim, of course, the old miser; the assassin, James Harden!

This evidence, though so weirdly extraordinary, was incontestible, and the crime was brought home to my wretched cousin. It appears that the miser had declared he believed his end near at hand, and that he would leave me all his money, instead of to James. The latter, incensed, had murdered him, planning everything with fiendish cunning, so that suspicion should fall on me. But he had committed the crime too late; for my uncle had already executed a will in my

favor, the latter circumstance having afforded a fresh proof of my apparent guilt. Thus it came to pass that James Harden was betrayed, and that I was saved—by the telephone!

THE SOLDIER'S RUSE.

The moon was shining brightly, illuminating the sandy plain round the fort as only the moon in Arizona can illuminate.

The officers, soldiers, and their families were peacefully sleeping; not a sound was heard, except the occasional cry of a coyote.

Three o'clock struck, and the sentinel who was on duty at post No. 1 started the call:

"No. 1. Three o'clock, and all's well!"

A slight pause, and No. 2 responded:

"No. 2. Three o'clock, and all's well!"

Then came a long pause.

The sergeant of the guard stepped out of the guardroom and listened.

"The sentinel on No. 3 must be asleep," he remarked.

"Bad business for a sentinel guarding the corral"—the enclosure in which the horses are tethered.

Turning to No. 1, he commanded:

"Start the call again!"

No. 1 obeyed; No. 2 took it up. But there again it ended.

The sergeant turned out a patrol and marched to the corral.

As he approached the sentinel's post in the moonlight, he saw the figure of No. 3 stretched out on the ground. The position did not look like that of a sleeping man.

"Double time!" commanded the sergeant. And the patrol came down the post at a run.

As the men came closer to the figure, a sight met their eyes that froze the blood in their veins.

Lying face down in the sand, his hand still grasping his rifle, was their comrade, stiff and cold in death, an Apache arrow buried deep in his body.

Three sharp cracks of the rifle, and the rattle of the long roll of the drum, soon brought the startled garrison to the spot.

Scouts were instantly sent out, and the plain thoroughly scoured, but no Indian signs could be found.

The next day, with muffled drums, the members of the garrison followed the body of their comrade to its last resting place. With uncovered heads, sorrowfully and reverently, they listened while the chaplain read the burial service. Naturally, a gloom was thrown over the whole post.

The soldiers gathered in small groups and discussed the perplexed question: "How could it have been done?" The moon had been shining brightly, and there was no cover behind which an Indian could conceal himself.

The searching parties came in after fruitless hunts. Several days passed, and the post settled down into its old ways, and the memory of the dreadful event was beginning to fade.

The officer of the day was making his inspection of the sentinels, after midnight, and was approaching the post of No. 3, when the moon, which had been hidden behind a cloud, suddenly burst forth, revealing, at the very feet of the officer, the body of the sentinel, as before, completely pierced by an Indian arrow.

The alarm was quickly given; but, in spite of the most careful search, no trace of the assassin could be found.

A horror settled over the post. No one dreaded an enemy they knew and could fight openly, but against such ghostly attacks no one could defend himself.

At officers' call the next morning the affair was earnestly discussed. It was evidently wrong to require a sentinel to keep guard in such an exposed and dangerous place, and yet,

the corral where it was, no one could see how it could be avoided.

While discussing the problem an orderly appeared and reported:

"Private Rogers would like to speak to the commanding officer."

The commanding officer went into his private office, and, after the interview, returned to the room where all the officers were assembled and announced:

"Young Rogers has asked permission to take charge of post No. 3 at night until he solves the mystery, and I have granted his request."

The faces of the officers showed plainly the anxiety they felt.

Young Rogers was the son of a brother captain in their regiment, who, at that time, was away on recruiting service.

The young man had enlisted six months previously, with the object of obtaining an officer's commission.

He was excused from all duties during the day, and after nightfall assumed charge of the dreaded post No. 3.

Three nights passed without any event.

The moon, though on the wane, was still bright enough to allow Rogers to see any moving object on the plain.

One would have expected to have seen him alert, actively watching for the slightest sign of danger; but he had a different idea.

Seated on the ground, his back against the corral, his rifle on his knees, he was apparently asleep.

Apparently only, for his sharp eyes keenly watched every point of the plain. He knew that he had a shrewd, tricky, but, at the same time, a bold enemy in that wily Apache. He felt sure that the Indian, especially in the second case, had not crept upon his victim unobserved. He must have employed some disguise which had completely deceived the sentinel. What was his disguise?

"That Apache would be more apt to betray himself if he thought me asleep than he would if he saw that I was watching him," was his sound argument.

Through the long hours of the night he sat motionless. It was two o'clock, when suddenly he caught sight of a moving object on the plain some distance away. Noiselessly he cocked his rifle. He was a dead shot, and woe be to that object when he fired. Nearer and nearer it came, while he sat as if asleep.

"Why, it is Corporal!" he suddenly exclaimed to himself.

Corporal was a fine, large Newfoundland dog, the pet of the garrison, who had mysteriously disappeared from the post two weeks before, and whom every one supposed to have been stolen.

Rogers' first impulse was to call the dog, when he remembered his resolution: "Shoot any moving object that comes within range."

He therefore restrained his impulse, and no one could have guessed that the apparently sleeping sentinel was closely watching every movement as the dog approached.

It was a lucky idea of Rogers' to feign sleep, for, as the dog came nearer, he thought he noticed something peculiar in its appearance, and its actions did not seem quite natural.

"Possibly Corporal may be exhausted from hunger, or it may be the deceptive light of the moon," thought Rogers.

The dog was now within close range, and he could hesitate no longer.

"It is a matter of life or death," he reflected, "and if I make a mistake, every one—even Corporal himself—will forgive me."

Slowly and imperceptibly he brought his rifle to his shoulder, a short but true aim, a crack, and a yell—such as only an Apache who has received his death wound can give—startled the whole garrison.

As if by magic, every one collected on the spot, each as he approached evidently expecting to see a repetition of the tragedies.

The story was soon told. The skin of poor Corporal had been used as a disguise by the Apache, who, with bow in

hand, had been creeping upon his third intended victim. Deceived by the apparently sleeping sentinel, he had been led to betray himself and had met a most merited death.

Young Rogers was overwhelmed with congratulations. A special report was at once made to the War Department, and before long he received as a reward his much-coveted commission.

DIPLOMACY.

"I think you will like this goods, madam," urged a salesman in a Euclid Avenue shop. "It is just the thing for a stout, middle-aged lady."

"Sir!" squealed the customer in a rage. The clerk saw his faux pas and recovered himself quickly.

"Pardon me," he smiled, "I mistook you for the young lady who was in here yesterday looking for something for her grandmother. Now that I look at you again, I see that this was an older person. Now, if you are buying for yourself, we have something over here that——"

KNEW ITS PROTECTOR.

In spite of his well-known poor marksmanship a certain Englishman was invited to the country for a day's shooting. The attendant in great disgust witnessed miss after miss.

"Dear me," at last exclaimed the sportsman, "but the birds seem exceptionally strong on the wing this year!"

"Not all of 'em, sir," came the remark. "You've shot at the same bird this last dozen times. 'E's follering you about, sir."

"Following me about. Nonsense. Why should a bird do that?"

"I dunno, sir, I'm sure," replied the man, "unless 'e's 'anging round for safety."

TIME TO STOP.

"Did I see any service?" exclaimed Mulcahy; "I should say I did. P'rhaps you never heard what the general said to me at the great battle we was in together. I'd been pegging away all day, loadin' and firin' without stoppin' for bit or sup. It was jist beyant sundown when the general came ridin' along.

"He jist watched me for a while, and finally he sings out, says he, 'Private Mulcahy!—I let her drive once more and then turned and gave him the salute—'Private Mulcahy,' says the general, 'go to the rear; ye've killed men enough for one day.'"

WHAT AILED HIM.

Anxious Mother—"I am so afraid little Johnnie is going to be worldly and frivolous. He was wishing to-day that he was a prince."

Father—"What does he know about princes?"

"He was looking at a picture of one."

"What sort of a picture?"

"It was some prince or other with a dog by his side."

"I see what's the matter. I'll get him a dog."

SHE WASN'T GERMAN.

A lady who had been abroad was describing some of the sights of her trip to a party of friends.

"But what pleased me as much as anything," she said, "was the wonderful clock at Strasburg."

"Oh, how I would love to see it!" exclaimed a young woman in pink. "I am so interested in such things. And did you see the celebrated watch on the Rhine, too?"

Three places at least are known where green snow is found. One of these places is near Mount Hecla, Iceland; another, fourteen miles east of the mouth of the Obi; and the third near Quito, South America.



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